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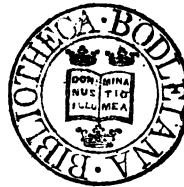
A Tale.

BY

GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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BENT, NOT BROKEN.

CHAPTER I.

BATTLE ROYAL.

THE racing had been concluded some time, and the course looked bare and dull, but not so the town, when the Waveley trio stood outside the door of the principal inn at Edgeton, when, as before related, Frank proposed, and Stephen seconded, that failing a better conveyance than a donkey cart, they should walk to the Hall.

"It's barely eight miles to Waveley off end," said Frank, "and then less than two to the Hall—say nine miles."

"And plenty of mud too," said a voice close by.

Frank turned sharply round upon the speaker,

who was a rough, slouchy, ostler-looking fellow, standing with a knot of similar characters under the lamp close by.

"Nine miles," said Tom, pulling out his gold watch, "and now six o'clock. I'm not going to walk nine miles to-night."

"Nonsense," said Frank; "why, with a few cigars to while away the time, we shall be there before we know where we are."

But Tom would not listen to what his friends called reason. He would consider the matter over a bottle of Bass, and therefore the party adjourned to the bar, and the bottle of ale; when the obstreperous Tom was partly won over to his companions' way of thinking; and then the victory was completed by the application of another bottle of "lotion," as Tom termed the Burton brewing.

At the end of another ten minutes the party were striding manfully out of the town, with trousers rolled up, cigars lit, and every indication that the walk would soon be achieved. The

evening had come in dark, for the young new moon was just setting behind the trees as they began to descend the main street; but the road had so often been traversed by the young men in bygone days that every turn was perfectly familiar.

The clock of the old abbey church chimed a quarter to seven as they passed the grammar school, where the dormitory windows were lit up and shadows flitting rapidly past, while now and then a dark body could be seen to pass before the light.

"Here! Look here!" cried Tom, arresting his companions, "bolstering, 'by Jove. There'll be a row about that, and it ain't bedtime. There, look at that; there's a set-to up there. How it puts one in mind of old times!"

In effect just then there seemed to be no ordinary scene enacting at the school; for flitting past the windows the figures of the boys could be seen charging and retreating, as though a

pitched battle were being fought, when suddenly the gas was extinguished, and all left in darkness. The trio then continued their walk, chatting about the old school and the events of the past day.

Before long the spot was reached where the upset had taken place; but the dog-cart had been removed, for they could find no traces of it as they passed. As they walked on, the conversation, which had been lively at the outset, became less continuous, so that by the time they had completed about one-third of the distance the cigars were smoked almost in silence.

"Some one coming on after us pretty sharply," said Stephen, all at once, as he stopped short to listen.

Frank and Tom both pulled up, and, following Stephen's example, could hear distant footsteps as of several people hurriedly following in the same direction, and evidently at something more than a good swinging walk.

"Come along," exclaimed Stephen; and they

continued their route, but before long they were passed by four men, whom they seemed to recognise in the dim starlight as a part of the group they saw outside the inn at Edgeton, and evidently members of that nomadic tribe to be met with at every race.

The men passed them with a rough "good night," and then continued straight on at a sharp rate, their steps gradually becoming less and less audible until they were heard no more.

"Now, where can they be bound for?" said Frank, when the party was well out of hearing.

"That's just what I was calculating," said Stephen; "there seems nowhere for them to be making for out this way. Ramsford's quite eighteen miles across country, and fearful roads; Pinxley—Waveley—there's nowhere else, unless they mean the "Fighting Cocks," at Cobbleton. I can't bottom it, for there's nothing out here to attract strangers like them."

"Going to join the navvies on the new line

somewhere, and try and get a lift in the trucks," suggested Tom.

"No; that's not it," said Frank. "That class of fellows does not mix with the navvy at all. They have worked down this way from Doncaster, and belong, if they belong anywhere, to one of the large towns. You may depend upon it they are upon no good errand. I prophesy a robbery somewhere before morning. They are certainly not bound for the line, for the men don't work by night now they are through Pinxley tunnel.

"Oh, bother!" said Tom, "what does it matter? Hold hard a minute, my light's out. Confound it all, how muddy it is. I'm as tired as a dog."

"Never mind the mud," said Stephen; "step out, my lads."

"I dare say you will laugh at me," said Frank, just as they were entering between the two rows of cottages dignified by the name of Smokeley Street, a hamlet consisting of about twenty labourers' tenements, a farmhouse, and a low

beershop; "I dare say you will laugh at me, but I don't like the looks of this, and honestly wish we had not come."

"Oh, step along!" exclaimed Tom and Stephen; "we are in for it now, and shall soon be there."

"But I don't feel half satisfied," said Frank, musingly.

"Well, but who does?" said Tom. "Who does like it, or feel half satisfied? I know I don't, and shan't either until I get my legs under Squire Vaughan's mahogany. Catch me out again with such a pair of reckless drivers."

"Don't be an ass, Tom," said Frank, seriously. "Those fellows are up to no good. Do you remember pulling out your watch in front of the Chequers? I've been turning it over in my mind for the last ten minutes, and honestly I believe that's what they are after."

"No; hang it all!" said Tom, pulling up short, and evidently quite taken aback—"but there, get out with you—you're chaffing. Come

on, my lads," he continued, and then singing,—

"Breathed in the words, I'm an Englishman."

"Oh, ah! of course we shall have a highway robbery by Dick Turpin and Tom King, supported, aided, and abetted by two footpads with craped faces and pistols; Claude Duval and Jerry Abershaw acting as a reserve body of cavalry. Never mind,—'Britons never shall be slaves.' Who's afraid?"

"Well, may I be hanged if I'm not," said Stephen, giving his long arms a sort of windmill swing—"not quite afraid of those fellows, but afraid that there's some mischief brewing. What shall we do Frank—go back, or stop here at Johnson's for the night? He would let us sit by his fire and smoke till morning. Or we might borrow a stout stick or two."

"I can't say I like the idea of either going back, or stopping here," said Frank. "They would all be so uneasy; and besides, it may after all be only my imagination. But at all events

we will call at Johnson's and borrow a stick or two, and then let's push on. They would certainly be uneasy if we did not return; and if your father sent any one to meet us, and heard the reason for our halt, I can't say that I should like to meet him again."

"No," said Stephen, "he would call us all the curs and cowards he could think of. What do you say, Tom—shall we push on?"

"Push on," said Tom, "of course. You're a clever pair, no doubt; but if you think I'm taken in with all this banter of yours, my boys, why you are precious mistaken."

Banter, or not, Tom's companions did not think it worth their while to test his credulity any further, but turned in at the little farmhouse, where they received a hearty welcome, and a glass of genuine home-brewed, that satisfied the palate of even the fastidious beer-loving Tom.

Burly farmer Johnson, upon being frankly told the object of their visit—namely, to borrow

something in the shape of weapons of offence—said that there was no harm in being prepared, and he brought out a constable's staff, a stout walking stick, and, to the intense delight of Tom, a flail. Tom directly elected to handle the flail, as being a superb weapon, and gave it a twirling flourish which terminated in his placing to his own account a very sounding rap upon the head—flails being rather awkward instruments in the hands of tyros.

It was very evident, however, to Frank and Stephen, that their host was rather amused than otherwise; so, stoutly refusing his proffered company for a mile or two, and the big sheep-dog declining to follow them without his master, they once more set off to accomplish the remainder of their journey.

“Hang him,” said Frank, “I wish we had not gone: he was laughing at us the whole time.”

“I don't wish so,” said Stephen, quietly. “Take no notice; but is not that one of the fellows?”

They were just leaving the hamlet, and passing the open door of the beerhouse, when, as Frank glanced on one side, he could see what appeared to be one of the four men standing in the open doorway, and apparently smoking, but, as it struck them, having an eye to their movements.

It was now if anything a little lighter, for the stars shone brightly; but, unfortunately for the travellers, a great deal of the road to come was overhung with trees, and for some distance lay through a deep cutting, where the sandy, martin-honeycombed banks were some forty feet high upon either side, making it in summer a delightfully shady place, and a beautiful walk, though anything but agreeable on an autumn or winter's night.

"Steve, old fellow," said Frank, when they were about fifty yards past the beershop, "that looks rather ominous. Just cast an eye back and see if he follows."

Stephen Vaughan did so, and could just make

out the man's figure as he passed the light streaming from the door. Upon mentioning to Frank what he had seen, the latter whispered—

“Keep on walking—don't stop; are there any more with him?”

“I can see no more,” said Stephen, after a minute's scrutiny, during which he walked backwards, “but they may be with him for all that.”

“Then,” said Frank, “depend upon it they are on in front, ambushed; and that chap was left behind to watch us.”

“I say,” said Tom, speaking rather huskily, “'pon my word, I thought you were chaffing all the while. This means milling, don't it? What are we going to do?”

“Why,” observed Frank, “we must either go forward or go back, unless you can suggest anything better.”

“I don't like fighting,” said Tom; “at least I don't think I do, for I ain't tasted it these ten years; and I don't like being robbed; and I

don't like going back and looking spooney, for after all we don't know that anything will happen. I don't care," he continued doggedly, "we're all in the mess, and I'm in a deuce of a stew, but I shall try and do as you do; but let's bolt if we can."

"Come along, then," said Frank, "and keep a bright look out. There were only four; and surely we three, with right upon our side, ought to be a match for them. Do as I do—put your watches and chains in your trousers pockets along with your money, and step out; for perhaps after all I've only been raising up a bug-bear to frighten you both."

"Boo—oomph—who's afraid?" cried Tom, puffing out his cheeks.

"Well, you must stick to us, Tom, if there is a row," said Stephen.

"All right!" cried Tom; but in a tone of voice which seemed to indicate that he thought it all wrong; and then keeping closely together, and in silence, but keeping a keen look out on both

sides, they walked sharply on for about half a mile to where the road dipped down between the high banks.

“ ‘Valley of the shadow of death,’ ” muttered Tom, in a whisper; “ what a cut-throat-looking place by night ! ”

“ Frank, whispered Stephen, “ that fellow’s closing up fast: he’s not far behind. Let’s trot through here.”

Keeping to a regular infantry double, they then set off, well closed in together; but they had not gone fifty yards before a shrill chirrupping whistle made Tom stop as if electrified.

“ Come on ! ” shouted Frank, as with Stephen at his elbow he charged down upon three men who stood right in the road to dispute the way.

“ Stop ! ” roared one of the fellows with an oath, and then rolled over with the blow he received from the short staff which Frank had handled with great precision. At the same moment Stephen made right and left cuts at the

other two, but aiming at too much, hit nothing—receiving, however, a nasty crack himself as the men parted to let him through; which was a very sensible act on their part, since he charged down something after the fashion of a young bull.

A sharp run would now have taken two of the party out of danger; for, like all country-bred young men, they could use their legs; but Tom Phipps had to be considered, and like some of the horses in that day's race, he was "nowhere;" but in spite of such a case of no *locus standi*, he was shouting lustily for help.

"Come on back, Frank," hissed Stephen between his teeth, for the blow he had received made him feel savage; and then the pair rushed back to the aid of Tom, just as that gentleman with a desperate blow of the flail temporarily rid himself of an enemy—one of the men by whom Stephen had passed; this blow, however, was afterwards owned by Tom to have been "a fluke."

But Tom's success was only short-lived, for before his enemy had well fallen the man from the beershop came behind the hero of the flail, and with one well-directed blow upon the ear sent him staggering up against the bank.

There was therefore one man literally thrashed and lying motionless in the road; but the fellow Frank had sent over was now up again, and a desperate encounter took place between the three men and the two schoolfellows. The attacking party were armed with hedgestakes, and seemed bent upon mischief; but there was no time allowed for thought, and in the *mêlée* which ensued }
blow succeeded blow with far more rapidity than effect. Still some nasty exchanges took place, and, in spite of Stephen's strength, it would have gone hard with them if in the midst of the struggle Tom had not somewhat recovered himself, and then with a shriek of fury rushed with doubled fists at the first enemy that presented himself, and punched and pummelled away with no mean display of skill. Tom closed with the

fellow at once, and well made up for his want of size by activity, giving his opponent enough to do to take care of himself, for he had broken his stick. But in the rounds which followed, poor Tom was at a great disadvantage from being dizzy with the first blow he had received; and to quote the language of our respected sporting friend, the correspondent of *Beaux Life*, he was "heavily grassed" twice over; the second time his adversary coolly sitting upon the gallant little fellow's chest to keep him down and recover breath.

Early in the struggle, Frank received an ugly blow across the head, which made the blood spurt out swiftly; but he fought on manfully, with the warm stream trickling down his face, till, in making a blow at his enemy, his staff slipped from his hand, and he stood almost at his opponent's mercy.

The fellow was well aware of his chance, and aimed a blow at Frank which would have rendered him *hors de combat*, but, with a bound, the

unarmed man avoided the blow, darted within the fellow's guard, and then, in strict accordance with the noble art of self-defence, as taught by professors at Cambridge, Frank gave the scoundrel such a fistic crack in the mouth as made him drop his stick and shake his head. This blow was so vigorously followed up, that Frank's enemy soon began to back, and a last left-handed crack upon the nose seemed to yield so little satisfaction, that he turned and fled.

Just then Frank kicked against one of the sticks, and picking it up, turned to see whom he could best aid. Stephen was engaged with an enemy, locked in a tight embrace, both using nature's weapons, and the former, from size and strength, evidently the better man; while the fellow whom Tom had in the first instance thrashed, was just getting upon his legs, evidently with the intention of wiping out his disgrace.

But Frank's blood was now up—what there was left of it—and with one cut he sent the

fellow reeling backwards, quite disabled from further interference that night. He then turned his attention to Tom, who was some thirty yards off, lying upon his back, as already described. To rush forward to his assistance was but the work of an instant, and seeing the state of affairs, Tom's enemy would have left him and fled. But Tom, though down, was not beaten: he was only thoroughly spiteful, and when the fellow tried to rise, he hung on to him like a bull-dog, till Frank's stick came down "thud" upon the man's head.

Once more at liberty to turn his aid into another channel, Frank looked towards Stephen, who was still hard at work in a close struggle with his foe; and now for an instant an unaccountable something seemed to hold Frank back, and it required an effort of mind to conquer it. It is hard to say why, but in those brief moments the thought of the day's proceedings, and Madeline's suffused face on the race-course, came upon him; then the struggle in the wood, and

then the rescue from the pool—but before that recollection was half formed, Frank had conquered his weakness, and dashed at the remaining enemy.

But the fellow did not wait: for seeing another coming to the attack—to use Tom Phipps' expressive term when relating the story—he immediately “shunted.”

Fortunately, there was no more fighting required, for Tom was about done up, and leaning against the sandy bank dabbing his bleeding nose, while, forgetful of all other considerations, Frank and Stephen were having a quiet shake of the hand together. But Tom soon began to shuffle himself into shape again; spat out a mouthful of blood, and then, coming from out of the shade into the middle of the road, he set up a most hideous yell, but, withal, not such a bad imitation of the champion bird of the male gender, known by the same sportive appellation as pheasants and partridges.

“Cock-a-doodle-doo-o-o—ah-h-h!” cried Tom,

but ending in such a dismal groan, that, in spite of his own smarts, Stephen Vaughan burst into a hearty laugh.

His mirth, however, was but of short duration, for just then, as though struck by a stone from some mighty sling of old, Frank Henderson went down without even a warning struggle or reel, and lay motionless upon the muddy road.

Fortunately, they were not far from water, and between them, but with many a groan, Tom and Stephen managed to half carry, half drag, the poor fellow to the brook edge, where, after having his face bathed for awhile, he somewhat revived; when, fearing another attack, the three friends set off upon their homeward journey—slowly, painfully, and making but slow progress, for at times Frank could scarcely keep his feet.

“ Well, sir,” said Tom, in conclusion, “ we got here, but how we managed it, I can’t tell; and I’ll never believe but what it is twice as far as they say—and that’s all.”

“ Here—hold him !” shouted the Squire; “ he’s

light-headed—he's mad! He must have had a blow that has injured his brain."

And well might the Squire shout, and the ladies feel disposed to creep together, for upon finishing his narrative, Tom leaped upon a chair, crying out, "Hurray! we beat them!" He then hopped upon the arm of the sofa, where, balancing himself for a moment or two, he clapped his hands against his sides, and again yelled forth—

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"Oh," said the Squire, subsiding, "that's all, is it? And there—we've never given information to the policeman!"

CHAPTER II.

RIDING TO HOUNDS.

"OTHER leg first, Tom," said Stephen; and Tom Phipps, placing his right foot in the stirrup, essayed to mount, but saw through the trick directly after, and descended to earth again, while the Squire and Frank stood roaring with laughter in the stable-yard.

"Now, I tell you what it is," said Tom, pettishly; "if there's any more chaff, I won't mount."

"All right, Tom," said Frank, "we've done now; so jump up, and let's be off. The hounds meet at eleven." Then addressing the Squire—"You'd better come, sir."

"No, lad, no," said the old gentleman. "I shall, perhaps, get upon the cob, and come and

have a look at you, but I can't see eighteen stone taking hedges. My hunting days are over. Look after Master Tom, there, and mind he don't break old Captain's knees. Don't take the stiff fences, Tom."

Tom grinned a very peculiar grin; and then, as Frank and Stephen were already mounted, he again prepared to ascend to the back of his horse.

Now, during the past few days, friend Tom had been taking lessons in equitation down the little field, upon the back of the Squire's stout cob, with Stephen Vaughan for instructor; and having had it duly impressed upon him, that it was far better to learn without stirrups—for then, in case of a fall, there would be no danger—he had duly perched himself upon the slippery saddle, and gone bump, bump, bump, up and down the field. Then, obeying the orders of his master, he had gone round and round in a small circle, first trying his best to slip off on one side, then on the other—and, of course, dragging so at the reins,

that his position became worse from the sharp turns made by the cob.

"Only her play!" Stephen would exclaim.

"She's a bit fresh, from being in the stable two or three days—no vice in her."

Which was, of course, very consolatory to the rider, but at the same time did not make it much more agreeable when, from a gentle amble, Biddy, the cob, would put her head down, say "snork" very loudly, and start off at full speed.

"She always does so, when the wind blows on her a bit," said Stephen. "Stick your knees in, and keep a tight rein. Capital practice—don't lean forward, and keep your elbows well down to your side."

"Blow the wind!" muttered Tom, looking terribly serious, and recalling all the horse accidents of which he had ever read.

"Now then," said Stephen, "stick your heels into her ribs, and have a good sharp trot round the field."

"Wait a bit," said Tom; and so he said each

time, till the cob made up her mind for him, and, in spite of his jerking at the bit, started off at a canter with her rider, now trying to slide off, now recovering himself, and at last ignominiously resorting to the pommel of the saddle, and holding on, till Biddy pulled up short close beside her master.

But Tom progressed, and had a good hour's ride morning and afternoon, and had many a battle, too, with the cob about passing the gate which led out to the stables; for on the first morning when he was left alone, as soon as they had trotted once round the field, the cob made a shoot for the gate, and got her head over it, and there, at the end of half an hour, Stephen found her—Tom not having dared to drag her away, for fear of her turning restive. But now he had begun to revolt, and instead of letting Biddy have her own way, Tom asserted the superiority of man, by drumming upon her sides, jerking the bit, and forcing the refractory steed past the gate; and all to his extreme delight, for he found

the danger had been magnified by his imagination, and that, in spite of many a slip, he had not fallen off once.

But now, though not declared perfect by his master, Tom was to have the mount promised by the Squire, and on this particular morning began business by putting up the wrong leg first.

"What a tall horse it is," said Tom, trying to get his foot upon the stirrup-iron. "Hadn't I better have the cob?"

"You'll find old Captain a deal quieter," said the Squire.

"Hold still, will you?" cried Tom, making yet again another trial, but once more frustrated by the steed, which, anxious to join its companions, took a step or two in advance. "Woa, will you?" cried Tom, once more trying, but again defeated, and this time losing his hat, which, as hats will, came down with a bang upon the stones. "Here, come and hold his head, boy," quoth Tom, to one of the stable-lads: and then the Squire, seeing his difficulty, went and gave him a

leg-up, thereby nearly jerking him right over the horse. But Tom managed to save himself, and settled down, with his legs forming rather a large angle.

"How's stirrups, Tom?" said the Squire, ungrammatically.

"Can't reach 'em at all," said Tom; and consequently they had to be taken up a good many holes, until the rider's short legs found support. "Now then," said Tom, in a state of great excitement; "all right—I'm off!"

"Here; you sir—keep those knees in," cried the Squire; "don't sit like a tailor. There, that won't do—you've got your reins crossed."

"What's the good of having two?" said Tom; "I only had one with the cob."

"Why, to get you into a mess, if you go on like that," said the old gentleman. "You're pulling the snaffle on one side and the curb on the other."

"Well, but," said Tom, "you ought always to curb your steed, oughtn't you?"

"Curb the deuce," said the Squire. "Why, look here, man," and he then pointed out the difference between the two reins, and added a few other instructions. "He's as quiet as an old sheep; and all you have to do is to keep to the lanes, and see what you can of the run—for of course you won't try the fields."

"Oh, no—of course not," said Tom.

"There now! keep those heels out of his ribs, and hold on by your knees," growled the Squire.

"But they're sore," said Tom; "I've got the skin off!"

"Well, there—go on," cried the old gentleman, "and stick to him."

"That I will," said Tom, "just like a leech."

All this while Frank and Stephen had been taking a preliminary canter round the home field, and now returned to see after Tom.

"Now then," said Frank, "are you ready?"

"All right," said Tom, steering out of the yard gate. "Go gently at first, you know." And

then the trio went "gently" down the avenue—that is to say, at a walk; when, no sooner were they clear of the trees, than Stephen proposed a trot.

Tom was quite willing, and away they went, with the lesson-taker bumping about in the saddle, till he seemed to lose his breath.

"What makes him pi—itch me hup so high?" Tom jerked out at last; "t'other didn't."

"Bigger horse," said Stephen; "but you'll be all right directly. Give him his head."

"Ta—akes such long—ong steps," jerked Tom.

"Yes, he is rather rough in his trot," said Stephen; "try him at the canter."

"N—n—ot at pres—pres—pres—present," said Tom. "N—n—ot used t'him yet."

"Head up," said Stephen; "that's right: keep well down in your saddle."

"How the d—d—dickens can I," said Tom, "when's pup—pup—pup—playing cup and ball wi' me like this?"

"Don't drag at the reins," cried Stephen,

while Frank was almost convulsed with laughter. And in spite of all the precept, Tom found the tall grey horse very different in practice to the short-stepping cob; as, tightly grasping the pommel of the saddle with one hand, he began dragging at the reins with the other, in such fashion that at last, spite of its desire to keep with its companions, the quiet serious old grey horse pulled short up, and turned its head right round to stare at his rider—just as much as to say, “What do you want me to do?” and at the same moment off went Tom’s unfortunate drab hat into the ditch.

There is very little mercy amongst young men for a learner’s blunders; and, as a matter of course, Frank and Stephen roared with laughter—their mirth increasing to an alarming extent when Tom, partly on account of his hat, and partly on account of the serious aspect of the horse, slipped nimbly off, and then stood looking at his Pegasus.

“Why, what did you get down for?” cried

Frank. "I could have hooked your hat up with my whip-stock."

"Thank'e," said Tom; "but I've got it now;" and he had fished out his hat, but in doing so, he nearly lost his horse; for being left to itself, the sensible brute very wisely turned round, and was about making for its stable, when Stephen hooked the reins with his crop.

"There; jump up, Tom," he exclaimed. "What a fellow you are. We shall be so late."

Tom essayed to mount again; and by starting from a little hillock of road scrapings, he managed to pull himself up; but in so doing, dragged the saddle round, so that he sat in triumph upon one flap.

"You should hold on by his mane when you spring up," said Stephen, laughing till the tears ran down his cheeks at Tom's ludicrous appearance; but he quickly dismounted, and while Tom sat upon the horse's crupper, rearranged and tightened the girth of the saddle.

"There," said Tom, triumphantly, "I thought that was it; why, the saddle was not put on properly."

"Pooh!" exclaimed Stephen; "the saddle was right enough: it was you that were not put on properly."

And now, after a little more practice, Tom became accustomed to his steed; rose in the stirrups as the horse trotted, and being an apt pupil, began to improve wonderfully in his horsemanship. It was some days since the encounter in the lane, upon the strength of which Tom had obtained a renewal of his leave of absence, and they all of them bore evident marks of their encounter upon their faces; but as they were honourable scars, and they had gained plenty of applause for their gallantry, they did not scruple to show themselves in public. As to the men, they had made their way out of the place at once, and no traces could be discovered; but that was not very surprising, when it is taken into consideration that the news of the assault did

not reach the ears of Job Gauntlet, the police constable stationed in the village, until the next morning, nor those of Inspector Raynard till mid-day ; when, as the latter very reasonably observed, the fellows might have reached London.

There were plenty of horsemen to pass on the road, all bound for the meet, for it was the first day out of the hounds. Of course there had been plenty of cub-hunting, but I question whether that counts for anything with your true sportsman, bearing, as it does, about the same ratio to a good run as shooting cock-sparrows in a rickyard does to a battue amongst the pheasants.

There were plenty of horsemen to pass, mounted upon all kinds of quadrupeds—from the gentleman-farmer in scarlet, with hunting cap and Napoleons or tops, and riding his strong, large-boned, well-bred hunter, down to the butcher, mounted upon his raw, shambling, nomouthed, hurry-over-the-ground nag—or the baker upon his pony. Here and there, too,

appeared a lady, with pheasant-plumed hat, and long riding-habit, generally the centre of a knot of well-mounted cavaliers. For the South Moorland hounds were a famous pack, with a veteran master—one who had replied to the toast of “Success to Foxhunting” at many an agricultural dinner; so that the meets were very eagerly looked for, and brought horsemen from many a long mile off.

At last the cross-roads down by Cobbleton Heath were reached, and the gallant array presented by the horsemen made Tom grow quite enthusiastic.


“Riding’s first-rate, ain’t it,” cried the little fellow, with his face glowing.

“Capital,” said Frank; “but now you had better keep along the road, and then you can go your own pace, and to a certain degree follow us. For of course we shall go with the ruck across country.”

“Perhaps it would be as well to take up the curb, and keep a tight rein upon him when the

dogs give tongue, as he might want to follow," said Stephen, by way of caution; and then all moved off together to draw Cobbleton Wood—Tom following in through the gate, and keeping company with Frank as they trotted over the newly ploughed field, and skirted the wood, wherein they could hear the winding of the horn, the occasional shout of the huntsman, or the whimpering of a dog.

No fox in Cobbleton Wood; so off and away to Fallow Spring, where there was no better success. But such a glorious day—the sun out bright and warm, the freshly ploughed land looking of a rich deep brown; while the green banks still sparkled with the light hoar frost of the past night. The trees by the woodside were yet yellow and golden with the autumn leaves, and Nature seemed to be giving earth one last fête of warmth and sunshine ere the stern king came down to clutch his own with icy fingers, and sweep the woodlands with his stormy blasts.



No fox in Fallow Spring; so away down by Belledale to Chinkton Wood; Tom all the while bumping along, and enjoying it immensely.

"Stunning!" cried Tom, rather breathless; "out-and-out!" as Stephen Vaughan cantered up.

"Why—what is?" said Stephen.

"Hunting," said Tom.

"Why, we have not——"

"Yoi—yoi—hoi—hoi—oicks," roared a distant voice.

"Yelp — yelp — yelp; bay—bay—bay," went the hounds.

"Gone away—ay—ay—ay," rang out the cry along the field, now all in motion: some making for the gate, some for the wood, where the faggots lay, and the underwood was cut down; and others again, closely followed by Stephen Vaughan, taking the hedge, and galloping down the fallow on the other side.

"Out in the road, Tom," shouted Frank, pointing to the gate, through which were hurrying all the ill-mounted horsemen; and then, waving

his hand, he made for the hedge, which his horse cleared at a bound.

Tom's steed, in spite of his character for quietness, was after all equine; and, in the midst of the excitement, was ready to yield to temptation. He pricked up his ears, whisked his tail, and would have followed Frank, but for a dexterous drag which his rider made at the curb rein; but even then, the horse, being an old hunter, was too dignified to take to the gate, so he cantered towards the wood, shaking his head, and evidently wanting to be in the fun.

"Wo—ho—ho—ho!" sang out Tom, as he pulled at the reins; but it was of no use, for the horse made for a gap, and gently descending into the ditch, made his way into the wood, and right through it he went, picking his own way, and sometimes nearly getting his rider swept off his back as he passed beneath the trees.

Now this was all very well, and as Tom was no coward, he did not try to stay his steed's gentle trot; but when they were emerging from the

wood, his heart somewhat failed him as he saw what a ditch there was in front. Like many of the troubles of life, though, so was this ditch—not so bad as it seemed at a distance; and before Tom had time to think, the horse took it, and came lightly down upon the other side, with rider not so very far out of his place, considering, but minus both stirrups. These, however, he managed to regain as the horse gathered himself up, and prepared for a long gallop down the fallow field in which they were.

“Bay—bay—bay,” sounded the yelping of the dogs in the distance: and away went Captain, with little Tom sticking to him, as he had promised, “like a leech.” He had had a few trots, and more than one canter; but here was the horse before he knew it right off in a gallop.

“’Taint so very bad,” muttered Tom to himself; “but I think I’d rather walk.” However, as a matter of course, the steed took no heed of Tom’s mutterings, but began more and more to

warm to his work, and went merrily down the field, which, to his rider's great dismay, was crossed at the bottom by a stiffish fence.

"Time to stop him," muttered Tom, pulling at the rein; but without any visible effect. "Which did the old gentleman say was the one to curb him with?" Tom was at fault, and in his flurry managed to get his reins crossed, and himself in a state of confusion, when "whish, rush," the hedge was nobly cleared, and Captain off at full speed on the other side; while Tom Phipps, instead of being in his saddle, was gracefully reposing upon his back in the ditch, amongst the brambles and tangled undergrowth of the previous summer.

Thomas Phipps, Esquire, felt rather stupid and confused for a minute or two, when he proceeded to feel himself all over to see if there were any broken bones; but not finding any, he rose, re-adjusted his battered hat, and started off full tilt after the horse, shouting for it to stop, and halloaing till he was quite hoarse; and this he

kept up for quite half a mile, when, hot and breathless, he gave over in despair, and sat down upon a gate to consider what he should do next.

There he was, according to his own calculation, not far off Land's End ; neither house nor church spire to be seen ; hot ; out of breath ; muddy and torn, as to his clothes ; crushed, as to his hat ; bleeding, as to his face and hands ; while as to his boots, pounds of the rich soil clung to them. What was he to do ? There was a footpath upon each side of the gate, but which one to take ? For he was as likely to take the wrong as the right.

" Well, I didn't break my neck at all events," said Tom ; " but then I've lost the horse ;" and then the thoughts of his misadventure seemed to make the little gentleman so cross and vicious, that he pulled off his unfortunate hat, dashed it to the ground, and then and there kicked it.

" Hunting be hanged !" exclaimed Tom, in a rage.

" Lord, no sir, you don't mean that," said a

gruff voice just at his elbow, and turning round, what should Tom see, but the velveteen-clothed figure and hairy face of Mr. Thomas Sporridge, gamekeeper, and guardian of the preserved waters wherein the hero of the present adventure once had some pleasant sport. "You don't mean that, sir," said the man, grinning. "What, have you been throwed, and lost yer hoss?"

"Yes," growled Tom, in a sulky voice, very different to the tone in which he had once pressed refreshment upon the notice of Mr. Sporridge.

"'Taint no use going arter him," said Mr. Sporridge; "and I should say he'll find his way after the dogs till they kill, when he'll go home, or somebody will know him and take care of him. He ain't lost. You'd best come down to my place, you had, and have a brush-up. They're gone right off Ramsford way, and I'm bound to say, don't kill yet this next hour. Come on down to my place, sir; 'taint above a mile, and all in yer way home. Let's see, you stays down at Squire Vaughan's, don't yer?"

Tom signified his assent, and followed the keeper along different footpaths till they reached his cottage, where the fallen hero did not disdain to partake of a glass of home-brewed beer and a hunch of bread and ham.

“Can’t cut it so fat as you did, yer know, sir,” said the keeper, grinning—“chicken, and tongue, and pigeon pie, and all that; but—” said the man, turning all at once very serious—“you’re welcome, yer know, quite.”

After a rest, and a brush down, and a pipe with the keeper, Tom felt decidedly better, and consented to have the rough taken off his boots in the back-yard. After which, he had another glass of ale and another pipe. Then he had to inspect Mr. Sporridge’s guns, and the stuffed birds he had in the parlour—when, all at once, he declared that he must be off—his host volunteering to put him on the right road home.

“No, no, sir,” said Sporridge, stoutly; and putting his hands very far down into his pockets as


he refused Tom's proffered half-crown. "There is times when I likes a tip, and there is times when I doesn't; and this is one of 'em. When I arsts a gentleman to come and see me, and he condescends like, why I'm werry proud to see him, and feels a bit honoured like. You did the thing ansum by me once, when I warn't a bit proud, and now we're straight again; so whenever you're ready, I'm a waiting, sir."

They were soon out upon the road, when Tom learned that he had a five miles walk before him. However, he stretched out, and reached the Hall just as it was growing dark, and he regularly stiff and tired out with his exercise.

The side door was open, and he walked quietly in, when he could see that there was a light in the dining-room, and that the party were assembled for dinner.

"Queer," said the Squire; "the horse was in at the death, and unhurt, you say?"

"Oh! yes; and we brought him home with us," said Stephen.



"Did you make any inquiries?" said the squire.

"Oh! yes," said Frank; "and one man had seen him crossing a field, so of course he isn't much hurt; but we could get no further tidings, so expected that he had come back here."

"Surely he is not hurt," said Mrs. Vaughan, anxiously, while Alice looked quite pale.

"Hope not, I'm sure," said the squire; "or I shall blame myself for letting him mount the horse. But then it has not the least vice in it. Well, there—it's of no use; I must eat—*manger* as Alice calls it—and if we have to hunt him up, I'm sure we shall work better after a meal. Order in dinner, Milly; he'll turn up again as right as any——"

"Trivet," said Tom, making his bow at the door.

"Well done!" cried the old gentleman, brightening up; "I am glad you're come, boy. I'm as hungry as a savage."

"So am I," said Tom. "Nice fellows you

two were, though, to go off and leave a poor fellow to his fate."

Tom's fate, however, seemed from his manner to have been one of such a tolerable sort, that very little discomfort was felt on his score—attention being soon taken up by the contemplation of the covered dishes upon the table and the steaming fragrance they exhaled.

Commend us to a good dinner, after a tiring day across country. The French may feel proud of their cafés and restaurants in the crack Boulevards or Palais Royale; the Americans may produce hotels upon the most extensive scale, and we imitate them; grand dinners, public or private, may be given—but, depend upon it, there is no such satisfactory repast as that which can be enjoyed in a country house during the hunting season. Tom evidently thought so; Frank thought so, even though he was in love; and the Vaughans, father and son, thought so, and acted accordingly. Every one seemed too busy to ask an explanation of Tom's adventures; and he, poor youth, to

volunteer the account. It came out, however, at last, while the tea was brewing, and Mrs. Vaughan's open caddy sending a fragrant perfume through the room.

And it was during this narrative that Tom heard, or fancied he heard, one or two such sympathetic sighs from the young lady of the house, that he began to turn over in his mind what he could do next to make himself the hero of an adventure. But all at once a damp fell upon his anticipations—a sort of wet blanket—in the recollection that this was his last day at the Hall, and that the following morning must see him on his way back to Babel.

CHAPTER III.

MY DUTY TOWARDS MY NEIGHBOUR.

MAN is but mortal, so we cannot be surprised at the Reverend Charles Glebeley having his weak points, the worst of which points was one much wanting in sharpness—in fact, the point must have been quite turned, for the Rector had a bad habit of giving way before any one who withstood him. People who knew his good heart always ended in giving him their love or respect, according to their character, and thought none the less of the quiet old gentleman because he had generally two or three seed-packets sticking out of his pockets, or a necklace of matting, for tying plants, round his neck; and they even dealt very leniently with him when that awkward little accident occurred in the pulpit one Sunday afternoon, and woke up Churchwarden

Vaughan with such a start. People smiled, and talked of it for a week or two, and of course afterwards kept it cut and dry as a standing joke about "Parson"—but they liked him none the less.

The little mishap occurred one afternoon when he was preaching, and had grown very earnest over his sermon. The weather was warm; the church was warm; the rector was warm, and the people very sleepy—when, after rounding a very sounding period, he sharply drew forth his pocket-handkerchief to wipe his brow; but, alack! 'twas the wrong one, and contained full half-a-pint of a very choice kind of pea, which he kept picking as they ripened, to save *for* next year and *from* his enemies, the sparrows.

"Pitter—patter—petillato" went the peas, as they were scattered far and wide over the little church, while the bulk came down like a dried shower-bath upon the head of Squire Vaughan, who started up from slumber, shouting, "Con—" when he recollected himself and sat down again, blushing as red as the Rector, who did

the wisest thing possible—he continued his discourse.

But the rector somehow got into the habit of giving way to the new notions introduced by the curate, whom he looked upon as being a very enthusiastic, but most earnest man. Nor was the rector very far wrong in his estimate of his subordinate's character; while, unfortunately, he did not possess the strength of mind necessary to govern and direct this enthusiasm into a proper channel. Before the Reverend Augustus Newman had been at Waveley a month, he was head man; for the rector used to think he was relieving himself of duties which had pressed somewhat heavily upon him, when really he was resigning his reins of office.

Far be it from my wish to disparage enthusiasm in matters spiritual; but, like everything else, it can be carried too far, and verge upon that rather unpleasant burnt-faggot, "Fox's Book of Martyrs"—savouring thing called fanaticism. If our friend had known of such a fraternity at that

time, no doubt he would have gone to Norwich, and called Ignatius "father." But, unlike our old nursery-rhyme friend, the Man in the Moon, he did not get up late enough to find his way to Norwich—so, he never started beads and scapulary, sandal-shoon, vigil and fast, and all the other uncomfortable ordinances of the monks of old; without that agreeable reverse side, of which we read in rhyme, and learn how they had—

" Veal and venison, cheek and chine ;
Beef and turkey, peach and pine ;
And they gargled their throats with the right good wine,
Till the abbot his nose grew red :"

—and no wonder. But Augustus Newman did not know Father or Brother Ignatius, so he carried out, as far as was possible, the notions of his set at Oxford—first among which were very long-skirted frock-coats, to which he did not do credit by any means, being a very thin man, with a high development of shoulder-blade, so that he always looked behind as if he had borne the pilgrim's

burden for some time, but, having got rid of it, he showed the marks where it had rubbed his back and taken the nap off his coat.

Did he not wish that he was the rector ! How he would have improved things in general ! But then he was not the rector, and could not have the church reseated, tile-floored, and candles on the altar ; he could not preach in his surplice ; so he made the best he could of things, and obtained full sway over matters educational—worrying poor Timothy Boreham almost to death. It was hard work for the schoolmaster, with his wooden-leg and old-world notions, for he lived now under the shadow of that awe-inspiring personage, the Government Inspector, who was kept as a kind of spur for Timothy Boreham—one which was applied when considered necessary, by the curate, and it was an infliction which made the schoolmaster wince and shudder. The inspector was always coming, and sat like a nightmare upon Timothy's chest—he was on his round, and might be expected at any time ; it was not his custom to give

notice of his visits, and, therefore, absolutely necessary that the school should be in as high a state of efficiency as possible. Then there was the singing to work up, and the principal boys to teach chanting; which last, however, did not turn out a success, even though the curate lent his aid, which was almost a wonder, seeing, or rather hearing, that he had not the slightest taste for music; while the rector said it was quite as well, for with their limited resources as to vocal material, he thought if the children could sing a few simple hymns tolerably correctly, it was as much as they could expect.

Timothy Boreham told his wife in private, that he wished the school to be in a high state of efficiency; but whether, he said, it was the children who would not be highly efficient, or whether it was his fault for not being highly efficient himself, he did not know. And then, poor man, he would turn terribly despairing, and look with jaundiced eyes at the future; while in its turn, as it always will, being of a very tit-for-tatty

nature, the future looked very dismal and hopeless at Timothy Boreham.

Now, although Mr. Glebeley did not approve of the schoolmaster paying his dibber-like visits to his garden—visits which would only have been acceptable during potato-planting—he was foolish enough to fancy that he possessed quite a treasure in the manager of his schools. For, he argued, that what he required was a man content to be a village schoolmaster, and whose ambition was the imparting of knowledge to his pupils—a patient, enduring man, not easily discouraged—one who would strive to impart this knowledge by littles, as he could get the children to attend; not being disheartened, when one who had made, perhaps, a little progress, was taken away to work —“to tent craws,” mind sheep, pick stones, or, as often as not, when he was one of a large and poor family, “kep at home to help mooother,” or “nussin the babby,” returning, perchance, at the end of a few months almost as ignorant as on the day he first entered the

school, and with the work to be begun all over again—and this happening not once or twice, but constantly.

Now, Timothy Boreham really was a man of this description : he was no brilliant scholar, but a quiet plodder—a man who took delight in his weary task ; and, as far as is possible, he was beloved by the children. It is as well to say “ as far as is possible,” because children have a habit of regarding matters educational in a similar light to physic, and the administerer as their greatest enemy.

Mr. Glebeley had always made a custom of superintending the Sunday-school himself, telling the master that he had quite enough teaching during the week. Now, this agreeable *congé* was most thoroughly appreciated by Timothy Boreham ; but when the new curate arrived, and the pastor went off to Belledale to preach, the schoolmaster soon had his leave stopped. On the first Sunday it was not looked for ; while, upon the second Sunday, Timothy thought that

the curate was still strange in the place—though he made himself perfectly at home,—so it would be as well to wait another week before hinting at anything of the kind. So, on the third Sunday the attention of the Reverend Augustus was drawn to the fact, that there was a sufficiency of teachers for the classes, and the rector's rule made known.

“Oh, dear me, no, Mr. Boreham. Quite out of the question. We must all have our hearts in the work; and if not teaching, you must remember that you are learning.”


Timothy Boreham felt himself snubbed, and enjoyed himself during the remainder of the afternoon reading his Articles—getting through the whole thirty-nine once, and as far as the thirty-second in the second time of reading, where the subject being the marriage of bishops, priests, and deacons, the reader's attention strayed right away from the book he held in his hand; for he began to calculate upon the curate's chance of getting a wife; and to wonder, if he

did, whether she would turn out a tartar, and rule him with a rod of iron. No doubt if much vexed she would pull his ears, for they were long and tempting, while his hair presented no good hold, being cut very close, and looking decidedly unornamental. Strange musings for a school-master, after reading an Article; but so it was, and then he began to turn very drowsy. He had had an excellent dinner that day: to wit, roast fowl and boiled bacon, the former being made more savoury by the fact of Mrs. B. having stuffed it with bread-crumbs and butter well peppered—bread-sauce being an item unknown to that good lady. It had been a most toothsome repast, and one not often enjoyed; but Timothy generally did a good deal of land-measuring during his harvest-holidays, and when one of his clients, a farmer, had paid him, he presented him with a couple of fowls, one of which was the bird in question.

So Timothy Boreham felt very drowsy; and, just as he had satisfactorily arranged the matri-

monial matters of the new curate, he nodded very slowly and sedately, as though bowing to the assembled scholars, who had seemed gradually to fade from his vision. Mentally, though, a great deal took place during the time the schoolmaster had these nods: the inspector arrived, and insisted upon the curate marrying Miss Cinques; when the curate pursued him with the big black board, while the children all danced round, singing "Sally, Sally Waters, sprinkled in a pan;" and then the inspector boxed the curate's ears, and the loud pat awoke Mr. Timothy Boreham in time to hear such a howl, that he dropped his book, and started up in an instant.

But for this terrible howl, there would have been a profound silence reigning through the schoolroom. The buzz of voices had ceased, and every eye was turned upon a little weeping specimen of the growing female peasantry of England: to wit, Miss Mary Ann Blogg, of the fourth class, presided over by Annie Newman, who sat gazing with crimson cheeks at her



brother—then slowly approaching the spot whence the noise proceeded, while he wore upon his face an aspect of the most profound astonishment.

Annie Newman had made her first appearance in the school that afternoon, having been partly talked into it by her brother, who carried the day by announcing the fact that Madeline Glebeley made a point of attending herself. As for Alice Vaughan, she had no objection to an occasional visit, when she would sit by the side of Madeline; but with regret it must be stated that she declared that she would not teach any of the “little grubs,” and accordingly spent the afternoon in complete idleness. However, Annie Newman went for the purpose of teaching the “little grubs”—grubs which would never turn into the butterflies of life. And, considering that she had never taught before, the progress made was anything but small.

But there was plenty of work for the young teacher: the pupils divining quickly enough that this was the first attempt of their instructor, and in consequence being rather disposed to sneer

at the management, giving themselves airs; making much of their small persons; expressing their ignorance of well-known facts; and, altogether, as is customary with even children of larger growth, making themselves as obnoxious to their teacher as was possible.

Now this was all very well with the reading, though unpleasant enough; but when it came to questioning, and the hearing of catechism, poor Annie's troubles began to increase at a terrible rate. In fact, matters grew so unpleasant that she mentally declared that she would come no more. One pupil had made herself most objectionable from the very offset, and this small body was the before-mentioned Miss Mary Ann Blogg, who was even caught upon one occasion screwing up her intellectual countenance and "making a face at teacher."

However, the above juvenile specimen of manufacture, and a few other unpleasantries, were passed over in silence; though Annie felt so vexed with her task, and the children were so

tiresome, that she bit her lips and felt ready to cry. And then, too, "Gus" kept helping everybody else, whilst poor little she was passed by unnoticed again and again, though Madeline was visited three times, and good long stays made.

That catechism hearing was terrible; and Annie felt her troubles to be unbearable. Talk, laugh, and pass things from one to the other: the children would do anything of that description, but no one would answer—no one knew anything. The stolidity with which they stared at the questioner was worthy of transfer to canvas: the first girl would not know her name; it might have been "N. or M.," or anything else, for aught she would say. Consequently, she was told. Then number two did not know who gave N. or M. that name. Number three did not know what her godfathers and godmothers promised for her. In short, to judge from the answers, it might have been supposed that the catechism was being introduced to the class for

the first time. Miss Blogg was the ringleader of the mischief, though in this case the ring was only a semicircle ; and in spite of two or three nervously delivered reprimands, her eyes twinkled, and the example she set kept the other girls tit-tering, and the class in disorder.

The school was close, stuffy, and warm—between which adjectives the difference seems rather finely drawn ; and the consequence was that Annie Newman was in the moist state caused by warmth, a combination of annoyance and irritation all the while keeping her in a regular fret. Teacher and pupils had somehow or another stumbled through the questions and answers until they had arrived at the declaration of “ My duty towards my neighbour,” which fell to the lot of Miss Mary Ann Blogg, who, to her teacher’s surprise, began to run through it very glibly ; and when corrected in one part where she stated that a part of her neighbourly duty was “ to love, honoural, suckle my father and mother,” she went back to the beginning,

and said it all over again in precisely the same manner; and then, in spite of a new interruption which she appeared to despise, went straight on, evidently not taking to herself the clause respecting submitting herself to her teachers, but galloping on until——

“Keep my hands from stickling and pealing,” said she.

“Picking and stealing,” said Annie correctively, while the other girls tittered.

“Keep my hands from sticking and pealing,” said Mary Ann, to the accompaniment of more titters.

“Picking and stealing,” said Annie again.

“Keep my hands from pickling and stickling,” said Mary Ann, while her fellow-lambkins stuffed their hands and pocket-handkerchiefs, where possessed, into their mouths.

“Picking and stealing,” exclaimed Annie again, very loudly, very distinctly, and all the while growing very wroth, and looking exceedingly unlike a teacher.

“Keep my hands from stealing the pickles,” said Mary Ann, as serious as a judge, while the class was convulsed with merriment.

Poor Annie had not the saintly spirit of her brother, and she could bear no more. With her ungloved hand she gave the tiresome imp a sounding slap on the fat cheek that offered itself so temptingly. Mary Ann burst out into an alarming howl. Mr. Boreham started, and dropped his book; while teacher and taught—Annie Newman and Mary Ann Blogg formed the centre upon which every eye in the school was fixed.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW MRS. VAUGHAN SIGHED.

"Oh, it was dreadful!" exclaimed poor agitated Annie, as she was walking away from the school with Madeline. "I felt as if I should have died with shame; but I couldn't help it, dear, indeed I couldn't. It was all Gus's fault, for making me go when I did not want to; and that little wretch tormented me until I could bear it no longer."

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Annie, again turning to Madeline with the tears in her eyes; "whatever will become of me? I shall be obliged to go home after this. Whatever will your papa say when he knows it? Don't you think it was dreadful?"

"I do think it a pity that you should have done so, dear," said Madeline; "but I know that

it must have been very trying. The children require a great deal of patience."

"I felt so hot and cross, I could have done anything, I'm sure," said Annie, in a lachrymose voice, when at a turn of the lane they encountered Alice, who was immediately enlightened upon the whole affair, and asked if she too did not think it very dreadful.

"A nasty little grub!" exclaimed Alice. "I should have knocked her little head off, I do believe. I wonder you both have patience to go, and here have I been waiting for you both all this beautiful bright afternoon. Let's turn off and go through the fields."

Annie hesitated for a few moments, as she thought of the coming lecture she would receive from her brother, and wondered whether her absence for a while would augment its acerbity. But another temptation from Alice made her accompany her friends. On reaching the stile, however, Frank and Stephen were visible half across the long field; so, as in duty bound, the

ladies retired and took to the road ; but no better ; the curate had made a short cut across the back field, and if they went in this direction they found they must meet him.

“ Why, there’s Gus ! ” exclaimed Annie, in a tone of vexation. “ As if we had not had enough of him all day. I know he’s making a sermon for me by the way his arm’s working. Oh ! pray let’s go back.”


“ But it will look so strange,” said Madeline.

“ Oh, never mind ! ” exclaimed Alice. “ We had better make a hole in our manners than be bored by him for an hour,” and, of course, she was ignorant of the wretched pun she had made, as, setting the example, she whisked round, and the party quickened their steps so as to pass the stile again before Frank and Stephen could get across the field. It soon, however, became evident that this could not be effected, so the pace was slackened as the mighty proportions of Stephen Vaughan appeared leaning over the stile, waiting of course for the approach of sister Alice.

"There!" whispered the latter to Annie. "I'm quite ashamed of what I said just now, it was so rude. Pray say something cross about big Stevie."

"Hush, pray!" exclaimed Annie; "here's Gus!" Which was the case, for the slackening of the pace had enabled him to come up hand over hand, as nautical gentlemen would say; but here, decidedly, long leg over long leg, and the party became equally balanced as to sex at one and the same time.

There was now no excuse for not crossing the stile; so they all strolled leisurely across the fields, the path necessitating the formation of pairs, when, to Frank's intense disgust, he was compelled to give place to the clerical dignitary; while by a clever piece of scheming, Alice contrived to leave Annie by the side of her brother, at the same moment giving him a glance which completely upset his conversational waggon—generally a slow one—for the remainder of the walk.



With every desire to render justice to all, we cannot say much about the conversation; for three couples were talking at once. Alice was very mischievous, and full of acid remarks about the tall gentleman in front, and these remarks fell upon soil well prepared for their reception—Frank being rather cross on account of being superseded, and willing enough to chatter with the fair maiden when tenderness was not expected. The consequence was that their conversation was of too spiteful and unbecoming a nature to be recorded. So leaving the other couples out of the question, it must be recorded that upon this very afternoon, and not far from the same time, a conversation was taking place at the Hall, where the Squire—for people always would call him so—where the Squire was not essaying his port, old-crusted and of some particular vintage, but partaking of that plebeian beverage, ale, and smoking a long clay pipe.

The ale was certainly inclosed in a noble old silver tankard, and was of the best homebrewing;

but the pipe and pot, though of silver, did not accord with the *entourage*—for Mrs. Vaughan was a woman of some taste, while her lord possessed but little. He certainly did take great delight in his plate, while the flagon would not have disgusted Benvenuto Cellini, and therefore did not seem so much out of place in the drawing-room; but then upon the little marqueterie table stood as well the old gentleman's vulgar-looking, common, leaden tobacco-box, with its blackamoor-head handle, the ebon countenance looking wild and scared, as if ashamed of being in such a place; for the silver flagon really did not keep it in countenance, though it did the Squire—a fine, rosy, jolly, health-veined countenance, one that it was a pleasure to see. He did not look out of place anywhere, although his abominations did in that Hall drawing-room, where the carpets, hangings, and furniture were happily chosen, and blended well with the chastely-painted walls.


The wife of the British Farmer is rather famous,

as a rule, for the ornamentation of her house ; being given to neat red and yellow, with a touch or two of blue, and these extremely mild tints peep out very strongly sometimes on carpet, paper, and curtain ; while the furniture is, perhaps, decidedly comfortable, where, perhaps, it is as well to stop. But Mrs. Vaughan was somewhat of an exception, and considered the drawing-room as her special property, allowing the Squire's imagination to run rampant in the old dining, or as he always called it "keeping," room. Mrs. Vaughan's pictures were pretty and well-chosen. They were, probably, but copies ; but then instances sometimes occur where, heretical as it may seem to express such an opinion, the copy, as far as appearances go, is preferable to the original. For some ignorant, unorthodox people will persist in refusing to pin their faith upon the Old Masters' canvas—being so blind as not to see the beauties pointed out to them by adepts in such matters. Did not raw C. Enna one day say when he could not sell

his picture, that a tableau of heavy Dutch peasants drinking with their fat vrows might be all very well; but if he had painted it he would bet "a fiver" it wasn't hung. But then people will be so absurd.

Suffice it to say that Mrs. Vaughan's pictures were well-chosen—her little tit-bit Arcadian scenes would not have disgraced Watteau; nor the gorgeous summer-scene, the warm-hued Turner; while one head, placed in an excellent light, from its ethereal, divine expression, might have been one of Murillo's beautiful realisations of a dream of an angel countenance. Well, as before said, all this did not match very well with the Squire's beer and tobacco, or rather they did not suit the room; but, for all that, the couple rejoicing in the name of Vaughan sat very comfortably together that Sunday afternoon, the Squire listening to his partner's ideas upon things in general.

Mrs. Vaughan had spoken, and, after speaking, sighed; while the Squire, after sending up a



cloud of smoke which looked like the old engravings of a water-spout, said,—

“But young folks are sure to get courting some time or another, Milly!” this being his unrefined way of talking about such delicate matters.

“Ye-e-e-es,” said Mrs. Vaughan; “yes, dear; but I don’t like the turn matters are taking.”

“Oh, they’ll come right sometime,” said the Squire, burying his face in the flagon, and then letting the lid come down again with a smart click. “Frank and she will get tired, and then, perhaps, the lad will stand a chance. Very warm there, ain’t he?”

“Well, really, dear, I almost think not, now; but he quite puzzles me. I think—that is, I’m afraid, poor boy, he’s taken up with this Miss Newman.”

“What! the little black-eyed lassie, with the dark curls, eh? To be sure: now you mention it, I think he is. Never struck me before. And a precious good choice, too. Don’t blame the lad a bit.”

Mrs. Vaughan sighed.

"Well, what's the matter now?" said the Squire. "Don't see anything to sigh about there, at all events, unless she wouldn't have him."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Mrs. Vaughan. "I should think any woman would be proud to have Stephen."

"Madeline, to wit," said the Squire, drily.

Mrs. Vaughan sighed again.

"But," said the good lady, after a pause, "Miss Newman seems such a different girl to Madeline—more giddy, and——"

"Pooh! pooh!" said the jolly old Jupiter, out of his clouds. "A bit skittish—playful—kit-tish. Seems to me as nice a little lass as ever stepped. But who'd ever think of that long chap being her brother, eh?"

"There is a great difference, certainly," said Mrs. Vaughan. "But then they are such complete strangers."

"Who do you mean by they?" said the old

gentleman. "Steve won't marry 'em both; and as to being strange, why not ask the girl here a bit oftener?"

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Vaughan; "why, that would be doing the very thing we want to avoid. You know you would like Frank to have our darling; and how often you've said they seemed made for one another; and the same by Steve and Madeline."

"Never said anything of the kind," said the Squire, sending up curl after curl of smoke towards the ceiling.

"Oh! indeed, dear, you have; when we have been talking about it, often and often."

"No," said the Squire. "No, Milly. Never did. Only said 'um,' or 'ah!' or something of that sort; because I knew it was of no use to say anything else about such matters. There, my lass, it's no good for you to keep bothering your brains about anything of the kind, for they'll choose for one another just as they like, and only come and ask our leave by way of compliment;

for they know well enough that all we can do is to keep them apart a little longer or shorter time."

Mrs. Vaughan sighed again.

"Now, don't be an old goose," said the Squire. "Why should you fidget about that? Of course I'd rather Frank Henderson had our little blossom than anyone I know—not that I want anybody at all to have her; but we can't force them one way or the other. If Frank prefers Glebeley's girl, why shouldn't he have her? And as to Steve, why he's quite big enough to choose for himself, goodness knows."

The Squire then made another reference to his ale, clicked the lid, and began smoking once more; but Mrs. Vaughan did not seem at all satisfied, and sighed again.

The old gentleman stared at her for a moment, and then laid down his pipe, left his chair, and crossed the room to where his wife was seated, and where there was plenty of room for him upon the sofa. So he took his place there very

quietly, and gazing in his dame's comely face, said slowly, as he tried to smooth out some wrinkles upon her brow,—

“Milly, do you remember six-and-twenty years ago?”

Mrs. Vaughan smiled and nodded.

“And do you remember my punching Dick Simpson's head?”

Mrs. Vaughan smiled and nodded again.

“Well,” said the Squire, still busy over the obstinate wrinkles, “do you know why I did it? Of course you do; it was to frighten him off, when your father wanted him to take my place.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Vaughan, warmly; “but he never should have taken it, John.”

“What, not if they—your old folks—had pressed for it, and kept on opposing?”

“No, dear, never;” said Mrs. Vaughan, with brightening eyes, and looking ten years younger.

“Oh!” said the Squire, drily; “you mean that, do you?”

“Of course,” said Mrs. Vaughan.

"Then what do you mean by spoiling my pipe this afternoon, and making sighs come buzzing about my ears like hornets when I want to be in peace? Why not let your children have the advantage of your own experience in such matters? I was never a very sensitive sort of fellow, but I remember making up my mind that if ever I had children of my own, I'd never give either of 'em such a stab, wilfully, as I got from your old folks just before my cut up with Dick Simpson."

"But——" said Mrs. Vaughan.

"There!" exclaimed the Squire; "I won't hear another word about it. Don't they say marriages are made in heaven, eh? Then don't be presumptuous."

"Still——" said Mrs. Vaughan.

"Yes," cried the old gentleman; "still, be still; and let matters take their course, and they'll all go on billing and cooing for years to come yet, without bothering us or any one else about their nests; so leave off making that row

of bars upon your forehead, and ring for some more ale."

But Mrs. Vaughan did not get up to ring for some more ale just then, from the simple fact that the Squire's arm was round her waist, and her head was resting upon his shoulder in precisely the position of six-and-twenty years ago; while it was evident that their thoughts had gone back, far back, to somewhere about that time when their love was young—when they were enjoying the sweets of that young dream, whereof we are told "there's nothing half so sweet in life;" and so they sat musing. The Squire grown grisly-haired, red-faced, and choleric; while his wife had grown plump—to say the least of it—and matronly. But there seemed yet a greenness and freshness about their affection; the leaves were well grown, matured, and tinged by autumn, but far as yet from being withered or sere; and unbecoming, and out of place, as such a scene might have appeared as a scene, yet, as a private matter, there was some-

thing in it touching ; so telling of the evergreen-ness of a genuine love, that anyone who had by chance happened upon such a couple—a couple whose ages might have been sixty, and five-and-forty—although a smile rose to his lip at the outset—yet might the thought of the future come, and a hope spring up for that same true hand-in-hand climbing of life's hill year after year—year after year—until the end.

“There,” said the Squire, jumping up all at once ; “there’s my pipe out, and my ale out, and the fire nearly out, and here’s the whole pack coming up the avenue. Why, here’s the long curate and Madeline first! Oho! that’s a knot in the arrangements you didn’t count upon, eh, Milly?” he continued, with a twinkle in his eye. “And here’s Frank and Alice—just look here! They do make a nice couple, though, don’t they?”

Mrs. Vaughan smiled and nodded.

“And here’s big Stevey and the little she-



curate ; and a deuced nice pair they make too, now don't they ?”

Mrs. Vaughan sighed heavily.

“ Ah-h-h !” ejaculated the Squire, looking round very fiercely ; but his partner was smiling in an instant, when they went to the hall-door together to meet the visitors, who declined, however, to enter, but returned down the avenue after leaving Stephen and his sister within the hospitable-looking porch.

On the return, Frank had Annie Newman for a companion, and won golden opinions by his praise of Stephen, a subject to which somehow the young lady with the dark eyes and hair seemed as though she could listen for hours—so quiet and attentive was she. While, until they reached the rectory, Madeline was kept on thorns by her companion, apparently determined not to quit her side, who discoursed entirely upon the subject of Sunday-schools till they parted, when Frank left for the mill, and the curate, taking his sister beneath his wing, not changing

the subject, continued his discourse. But he modified it most effectually, and made it of so sharp a character, that Annie afterwards told her friends that she had had a dreadful rowing, which lasted until church-time that evening.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHOOTING OF SAMPSON ELTON'S CORN.

"Now, don't ask me ;—please don't," said Mrs. Elton, wringing her hands, and looking imploringly at her spouse, who was then finishing his last cup of coffee, previous to starting for Edgeton Market, while Frank, greatly to the miller's disgust, was skimming over the last part of the *Athenæum*, and enjoying himself over his breakfast ; for his step-father never read over his breakfast,—in fact, he never read anything at all but the corn returns and the state of the market in the Ramsford paper.

"Now don't ask me—please don't," cried Mrs. Elton.

"Well, but I did ask you," growled Sampson ; "and it isn't very often I do ask you to do anything for me"—*me* very strongly emphasised.

"But you know, dear,—" protested Mrs. Elton.

"No: I don't know anything at all about it," snarled her lord.

"What would Mr. Glebeley say?" said Mrs. Elton.

"What do I care what Mr. Glebeley says?" growled Sampson. "I'm no believer in your parsons with nothing to do and large incomes;" which was a remark most applicable to the Rector, whose income was less than that of the miller.

"But you know, dear," said Mrs. Elton, "that you promised me I should always attend Mr. Glebeley's church; and I don't see what I could say to him, if I went to a Wesleyan tea-meeting."

"Say!" cried Sampson; "why, say nothing. What is it to him? Make some preparations; and get some cake made, and take some flowers over, and the best chayney, and silver spoons, so as not to be beat by the others; and as you're such precious friends with your dear Mrs. Vaughan,

why, borrow her tea-urn. You must go,—I promised you should.”

“Indeed, indeed, I can’t,” whimpered Mrs. Elton, who would almost as soon have walked to the stake of martyrdom. “Pray—pray don’t ask me ; for indeed I can’t.”

Mr. Sampson Elton gave vent to ’an expletive, and followed it up in the very un-Wesleyanish fashion of saying he would be somethinged if she should not take a tray at the anniversary tea-meeting to be held in the following week at Edgeton ; so he said she need “make no more bones about it.”

But as Mrs. Elton did seem disposed to make more bones about it, and as Frank at last put down the *Athenæum* to help pick one of these said bones, the discussion became rather warm, the latter gentleman, to Sampson’s great astonishment and ire-kindling, interfering very strongly and taking his mother’s side of the question—his ordinary habit being to preserve a strict neutrality.

"I must say, sir," observed Frank, "that as it is a question of religious scruples, I think my mother is justified in declining to go."

"Who asked you what you thought?" said Sampson.

"I merely advanced my opinion," said Frank, reddening.

"Then keep it till it's asked for, and don't interfere with what don't concern you," exclaimed Sampson, roughly. "I promised that my wife should take a tray there, and I say she shall; and so there's an end of it." And then the miller let his arm fall down by his side after swinging it about, and gesticulating as though he were imitating a lobster, and about to throw it off, and at Frank.

But Sampson was wrong: there was not an end of it; and Frank was wrong, too. If he had acted sensibly, he would have preserved silence; knowing that argument was useless with his relative, and that nothing was to be gained by a quarrel, he should have let him have his growl


out, and then quietly have renewed the discussion at some future time. But it must have been the weather; for Frank fired up almost as quickly as the miller, and began to talk very loudly about not standing by and seeing his mother insulted. Whereupon, presuming upon old acquaintance, Sampson called him some particular kind of puppy, which canine remark seemed to bite sharply, and affected the student for a moment with a rabid kind of passion, which induced him to jump up, collar Sampson, shake him till his teeth chattered, and then literally to thrust him out of his own room and lock the door.

Now no one can deny that this was a most reprehensible proceeding—one that nothing but a fit of ungovernable passion could have prompted. It was of no use for Frank to return to the table with eyes sparkling and crest erect—crowing over his deed; for already something was beginning to whisper to him that he had been making an ass of himself; and he was beginning to feel just in the slightest degree sorry, when “bang—clash—

smash"—down came the parlour-door, kicked completely off its hinges, and in strode Sampson, with his eyes terribly oblique, and his hair looking more stubbly than ever. He made believe as though he were going to rush at Frank; but waited with great consideration for a moment to give him time to run, and to further that object, he sidled along by the table to allow his enemy room to escape. But though Frank was not so hot as he had been a few minutes before, there was no run in him, and he stood very calmly watching the miller, and waiting to see what would follow.

Judging from Sampson's demeanour when he came back in so furious a mood, annihilating Frank was about the smallest thing that could be expected; but instead of giving the rush, he too stood watching and waiting.

Frank, however, had ended his part of the programme, and was very quietly listening to the whispered prayers of his mother, who, poor woman, was in a state of trepidation pitiable to behold.



"Ah!" snarled Sampson at last, showing his teeth and looking terribly doggy. "I shan't forget this at all, I shan't."

There was no reply from Frank; nothing but a calm determined gaze.

"D'ye hear? I shan't forget this, I shan't," roared Sampson, so that it was impossible for Frank not to hear.

Frank felt greatly tempted to say he was glad to hear it, and that he hoped the correction would prove salutary; but he had been guilty of folly enough for one morning, and did not open his lips. So, instead of rushing at his step-son, Sampson contented himself with shaking his fist savagely at his wife, and then, snarling like a whipped cur, he walked out in apparently anything but a Christianlike state of mind, and quite disgusted at being unable to bang the door after him.

But there was no bang in the door until the afternoon, when the village carpenter had been and acted the part of executioner by hanging the unoffending piece of panelling, nearly driving


poor Mrs. Elton to her wits' end to find excuses for its being down, and to evade the ill-restrained curiosity of the carpenter, who advanced his opinion that it must have taken "a tidy push to send that there door down; for them screws were in as tight as ever he saw screws in his life."

Sampson did not go to market, but sulked that day and would not go in to dinner, contenting himself with walking round to the kitchen-door, and from thence to the larder, where he supplied himself with a two-inch thick sandwich, and a mug of ale; and then, out of mere biting your-own-nose-off spite, leaving the tap turned, so that the home-brewed might waste, and make a mess upon the cellar-floor at the same time. He then walked into the mill counting-house to devour his meal, much to the disgust of the men, who liked the mill best in his absence.

As for Mrs. Elton, she would have gone out and begged of her lord to return and rule over the household; but she was restrained by the counter feeling induced by her son, whom she feared to

annoy by so doing. So that what with her nervous trepidation, and Frank's serious habit, brought on by the morning's upset, and the annoyance he now felt at having stepped out of the path of duty mapped out by himself—the cottage did not seem the abode of the Goddess of Happiness. The dinner was served in Mary's best style, and did her credit; the fowl was remarkable for the delicate brownness to which it was done, while the piece of chine was admirable. But the fowl and the porcine vertebræ shared the fate of the piece of flaky cod-fish which preceded them, and the apple-tart which followed—leaving the table almost untouched; and at last, when the carpenter had concluded his handicraftism, and Frank had settled himself at his writing-table, Mrs. Elton came and stood beside him like the famed Niobe of old—all tears—or to descend from classic lore to the domestic, like Mary, when pickled-onion time was on.

Mrs. Elton just then had a dominant idea in her mind: and that was, to get Frank in the



humour to go and fetch in Sampson—in short to make him a dumb apology; and no doubt it was most amiable on the part of the good dame, and conduct which the Reverend Augustus Newman would have applauded. But it did not seem very probable that Frank would come to her way of thinking; for having listened to her hesitating, incoherent request, he told her, rather bluntly, he would not.

“I consider that an apology is rather due to us,” quoth Frank, with dignity.

“Yes, my dear, of course,” said Mrs. Elton; “but then you know what he is.”

“I *do*, indeed,” said Frank; “and sooner than I’d go into the mill this afternoon and fetch him, I’d do what I really think must follow even now—leave the house myself.”

“Oh, Frank, Frank!” cried Mrs. Elton, appealingly.

“Now, listen, mother dear,” said Frank, “I tell you now once for all that I will not——”

Which was of course very headstrong and



foolish of a gentleman of his *calibre*; for although he had not time to say what he would not do, yet he very nearly had; and impetuous young men need be careful of their vows. Frank meant to say that he would not go into the mill to fetch out Sampson. He was going to say so in a very solemn manner, and had got as far as "I will not," when who should come tearing up to the window at a terrible rate but a man who, as a rule, made a point of imitating the slug in its movements, but who now ran up with fear and excitement depicted in his generally impassive face.

"Come out, sir! come out! The master's in for it!" he shouted.

When, of course, out rushed Frank and followed the man into the mill and upstairs to the floors used as granaries; and on arriving at the first, there were two of the men dragging away at a pile of full sacks which lay upon a hill of wheat.

The wheat had been dammed up with boards,

so as to prevent its flowing down the stairs, while at one end sacks upon sacks of the same grain had been stacked upon it; but now, from the giving way of the boards, they had fallen into a promiscuous heap.

"Well," exclaimed Frank, half-angrily, "what have you brought me out for? I can't——"

"But the master, sir," shrieked the man, "he's buried!"

Frank waited to hear no more, but began tearing away at the heavy sacks to reach the place where the men supposed their master to be; but it was not until fifteen had been dragged away, several of which, with quarters upon quarters of corn, came sliding down upon them, like quicksand, as they toiled up to their knees in the yielding grain, that they came upon Sampson's clenched hand, just protruded from the heap of corn in which he lay.

To seize the hand and for all to drag at it with might and main was but the work of an instant; but as they did so, down glided more

corn and more of the tottering sacks, covering the unfortunate man more deeply, and flowing down the trap-door in a heavy stream to the next floor, driving back poor Mrs. Elton, who, pale and affrighted, was climbing the ladder.

“Drag those sacks back!” shouted Frank, seizing the great wooden shovel that leaned against the wall, and making the corn fly from him as he dug it away. “Quick, men! quick!” he cried; and then, in answer to Mrs. Elton’s questions, he shouted to her to fetch more help.

And now he got down to the hand again, and making one of the men hold on by it, he soon scooped away the corn and laid Sampson’s blackened and distorted face bare; when down again from the sloping hill above came more corn, as though to smother out any faint spark of life that might yet linger in the miller’s body.

But this time, at the risk of being covered in himself, Frank stooped down and laid his back to the falling grain, so as to make of it a support

which kept off the gliding corn and left the buried man's face free.

"Quick, quick!" shouted Frank; "here's hundredweights pressing upon me, and I can't hold up long. Take the shovel and pull the corn away. Never mind it's going down the stairs!"

The men shovelled and scooped away at the grain, and more and more of the life-supporter—but in this case, death-dealer—was cleared from about Elton's body; while Frank, with the sweat streaming off his face, and nearly bent double, tried to keep back the weight that was pressing upon him.

But it all seemed in vain: a feeling of faintness, followed by a horrible dread of death from suffocation, came upon his senses, robbing him of all energy just as there was heard the sound of coming assistance; when down came another sack from the heap above, bringing with it an avalanche of grain, which buried him and the unfortunate miller in an instant.

It was but for a moment, though, for there were plenty of willing hands now to drag both from the certain death that awaited them, and carry them down to the next floor. Here, however, Frank recovered himself in a minute, but pulsation seemed to have almost gone from the miller.

To despatch a messenger for Mr. Childe, and direct the men as they carried Sampson into the house, was Frank's next task; when they had the satisfaction of hearing the miller give a faint groan as he was borne along, but even then he seemed as though life was extinct when laid upon his bed.


But very few minutes elapsed before Mr. Childe, the surgeon, arrived, and the look his countenance assumed did not give much encouragement to the onlookers.

"Buried in the corn, eh?" said Mr. Childe, throwing open the window, and trying to promote respiration. "Never heard of such a thing before. Bad as drowning, only no water in the

patient. But he'll soon come round, I see. How did it happen ? ”

Mr. Childe was not standing still, though, while asking questions and listening to the responses ; but all the while making the most strenuous exertions to revive Sampson, who, after about a quarter of an hour, began to breathe regularly and deeply, but still remained perfectly insensible.

“ As pretty a case of asphyxia as ever fell beneath the notice of a medical man,” said Mr. Childe, rubbing his hands, and continuing to busy himself about his patient. “ Covered you both, eh ? Bless my soul, how soon accidents do happen. Come hard on poor us if it wasn't so, eh ?—Die ? No, ma'am, not he ; not this time,” continued the doctor, pleasantly, evidently loving to hear the sound of his own voice, and asking the cause of the accident two or three times over ; but this time interrupting himself to answer Mrs. Elton's question. “ No, he won't die just at present,” he said, softly ;



"there's plenty of life in him yet; but it was a narrow escape—a scrape over the rocks—turning the corner and grinding the post—eh, Master Frank, eh? Well, but you haven't told me how it happened."

Frank had already told him all he knew; but how the miller first got into such danger he was unable to say; so Jem Wood, the foreman, was summoned, and came creeping up on the points of his toes, and only after three times telling, could he be induced to seat himself upon one of the very frail-looking ornamental chairs.

"How did this happen, Jem?" said Frank.

"Buried in the corn, sir," said Jem.

"Well, we know that," said Frank; "but how did it happen?"

"Well, sir," said Jem, "I didn't see it, but I heered it; and I supposes as he must ha' been walking up atop to fill his sample bags, when down comes one o' the sacks atop of him and knocks him over; and that starts the tothers, and shoves the boardings away, when the

loose would come down with a roosh all over him."

"Where were you?" said Frank.

"Oh! I was down below, sir, and heered him give a screech as went all down my back; and when I'd been up and tried to get him out, I runs down, sends the two chaps up, and then comes after you."

"But the corn could not have been safe," said Frank.

"No, sir, it warn't, and I told he so," said Solid Mahogany, pointing with his thumb over his shoulder at "he." "But then, what's the good o' saying anything? He thinks he knows best, and jumps down your throat if you says much."

Frank nodded, and Mr. Childe still busied himself about his patient, now evidently recovering, for he gave a sneeze.

"You see, Master Frank, them boards was only put up temporary, and the corn highsted into the top floor and poured down the trap, for they

warn't our sacks. Now, that was all very well; but then he ain't satisfied, and must have all them quarters in sacks piled up atop of it; and then there was more on the floor than there ought to have been, and of course directly them boards started down goes the lot, and now it's two days' work to go and get it up agen outer the next floor."

"Then why the deuce don't you go and do it, instead of cackling there?" snarled Sampson from his bed, where he now lay greatly recovered, and extremely *reconnaissant* for services rendered.

Solid Mahogany, otherwise Jem Wood, made Mrs. Elton a bob, and went out upon the tips of his toes.

"Ah!" said Mr. Childe, quite starting at the extreme suddenness of his patient's recovery.

"Ah! my dear sir; better, I see."

"Yes," said Sampson, growling, and coughing terribly. "Yes, I'm better."

"Then I think for the present I may——"
Mr. Childe hesitated.

"Go? Yes, please," said Sampson.

"To be sure," said Mr. Childe, with the ghost of a smile upon his countenance. "I'll send you a composing draught, and look in again towards night."

"What for?" coughed Sampson, leaning upon his elbow, and glaring at the doctor.

"Well," said Mr. Childe, "to see how things are going on."

"Oh!" growled his patient, "you can do so if you like, but I don't want you,—mind that. I'm not going to have a bill run up for—cough—cough—cough. Oh dear! oh Lord! oh dear!" gasped the poor wretch, coughing painfully, and blood staining his lips as he sat up in the bed trembling, for it was evident that he must have received some internal injury.

Mr. Childe was not a malicious man, but as he gave a significant glance at Frank, he took up his hat to go, when in a hoarse whisper Sampson called him back, and drew his attention to the blood upon the sheet before him.

"But, perhaps, you would rather I went," said Mr. Childe. "I should be sorry to be supposed to come merely to run up a bill."

"No—no—no," whispered Sampson. "I'm ill; can't you see I'm taken suddenly, and you want me to die. They want me to die, and get rid of me. That fellow Frank tried to kill me this morning, and I half think he went and loosened the boards for this job. But I won't die, though," he whispered hoarsely. "Curse me, if I do!" he cried aloud; and then wiping his mouth with his hand, he glanced at the blood and shuddered, turned pale, and fell back upon the bed, looking with beseeching glances at the doctor, who put down his hat, and, motioning to Frank and Mrs. Elton to leave the room, proceeded to examine his patient—patient enough now, and quiet as a lamb; and there he lay, drinking in every word and look of the doctor with an eagerness which bespoke the state of his mind.

"Do you think I shall die, doctor?" he whined.

"Um!" said Mr. Childe, meditating; "no ribs broken—inward bleeding—compression—ruptured vessel—small vessel of lungs, no doubt—styptic—Ruspini."

"Oh!" groaned Sampson. "It's all over."

"Oh dear me, no! don't be alarmed," said the doctor, forgetting his previous rebuff in professional love for an interesting case. "Oh no!" have you on your legs again very shortly."

"Will you?" whispered Sampson, eagerly. "Do your best for me, doctor, and you needn't be particular to a pound or two, you know."

The doctor could not help a smile rising to his lips, one which a bystander would have set down as mingled with contempt, but which Sampson took to mean encouragement, as Mr. Childe said:—

"Ah! we'll talk about that another time. And now, by your leave, I'll ask Mrs. Elton to step in, and give you into her charge for the present. I'll send you something directly, and look in again towards night."

"Ah! do, please," groaned Sampson; and then as the door closed on the doctor—"If there was only another one here," he growled, but sank his voice to a whisper directly after, for he had forgotten the ruptured vessel.

CHAPTER VI.

A STICH IN THE SIDE.

"MUCH hurt?" said Frank, as the doctor entered the little parlour.

"Pretty well, pretty well," said Mr. Childe. "Plenty, I should say, judging from present appearances, to keep him on his back for—say a month."

Frank shrugged his shoulders, for he could not keep the thought of the accusation out of his head.


"Nice man, Frank. Nice, amiable disposition. Now, what will you give me," said Mr. Childe, chuckling, "to come a bit of Borgia, and poison him off decently for you? He says you have attempted his life twice to-day, and you've proved yourself a bungler. You see, you are not a

licensed killer like a surgeon. But what a blood-thirsty chap you've grown, Frank!"

"Ah! it's pleasant, isn't it?" said Frank; "after saving his life half an hour before, at the risk of my own."

"Pooh! take no notice," said the doctor, "he isn't worth it. I'll send in a composing draught, and something for the inward bleeding. Little sickness do him good. Fine sweetener of a man's temper, I can tell you. Send for me if the bleeding increases at all. Ah! dear, dear!" said Mr. Childe, rubbing his hand over his bald head; "how time does go, Frank. It seems only the other day that I came downstairs from that very room, and the nurse was sitting in front of that very fireplace, and I'm sure I quite agreed with her when she said you were one of the finest boys she had ever seen,—and now to look at you, only think! How time does go. Good-day, Frank."

So Mr. Childe followed the example of time, and went off at a very great rate, for he had just



remembered another visit or two which he had to pay, and Mrs. Elton soon after descending, Frank and his mother were left to contemplate over their evening meal the pleasant prospect before them, if Sampson was upon his back for a month.

In spite of an extra good cup of tea, Frank felt uncomfortable; the burying he had suffered had shaken his nerves, and after tea he came to the conclusion that a pipe or two were necessary to compose them again, so he took down the large meerschaum and filled it from his choice jar—the sort that he did not smoke every day, but for economy's sake kept for special occasions; a rule, no doubt, more honoured in the breach than the observance.

Whiff, whiff! Oh! there was magic in every draw, and as the rings of smoke curled up towards the ceiling, the irritation gently passed away, leaving a sensation of calmness which formed a medium, seen through which, though slightly smoky, past, present, and future, all looked so much more genial and pleasant.

“Yes,” mused Frank, “smoking is, without doubt, a bad habit; but then really some of these bad habits are so pleasant that one would not like to leave them off.”

Just then Mrs. Elton, who was busily repairing one of her lord’s stockings, let it fall in her lap, and held up her hand to enforce silence, though no one spoke in the room.

Yes, there was no doubt about it; her lord of the creation was calling; and she hurriedly ran upstairs, to descend in a few minutes with the puzzled expression of countenance she always wore when Sampson had been giving her what he called a “setting down.”

“Well, Mums,” said Frank, who looked most serene and happy; “well, Mums, how goes the patient?”

“He seems a little better now, my dear, and easier; but—but—” said Mrs. Elton, stammering, “he complains of a tightness of the chest, and——”


“That’s no new complaint with him,” said

Frank, hazarding a joke, though there was not much fear of its being seen through.

"And—and—and," continued Mrs. Elton, "it makes him feel wheezy and irritable; and he says if you would not mind putting out——Yes, dear, coming!" cried the good dame, running to the staircase-foot, in obedience to a call from above.

"Am I to be choked with that confounded pipe?" came down the stairs, and just reached Frank's ears. Whereupon that gentleman smoked furiously with knit brows for a few seconds; and then in answer to his mother's appealing glance, he put on his wide-awake and strolled out to finish the soothing weed.

As Frank strolled out of the garden gate and along the lane, he came suddenly upon a navvy-looking man looking over the hedge at the cottage; but upon seeing himself noticed, he slouched down his cap and walked hurriedly off; while Frank gazed upon his fast-disappearing form and tried to make out where he had seen the man before. However, memory did not befriend



him, so he sauntered off in another direction for a quarter of an hour, and then turned back; when, as he approached the cottage, walking quietly upon the grass at the side of the lane, he could just make out the same figure, seemingly in the act of throwing bits of soil at the bed-room window where Sampson lay.

"Why, that's my friend that I had the tussle with," muttered Frank to himself; but apparently at the same moment the man saw that he was watched, leaped the low hedge, and made off again.

"I shan't chase you," said Frank, quietly; "but I should very much like to know what you want, my friend; and what connection there is between *pater* Sampson and your honourable self. There's something under the surface, that's very evident; or else he would not have denied having seen you so strenuously. However, there will be no meeting to-night."

Frank then sauntered on in the same direction as the man had taken, and after awhile again

came in sight of him, when he once more made off; and though Frank stood about for some little time, the man, evidently considering that he was watched, did not again make his appearance.

"I should be for setting our friend Job Gauntlet to watch you, my man," said Frank at last; "but perhaps I should be finding out something that I should be sorry for afterwards; for *pater* Sampson must have some antecedents he is not proud of, or he would not preserve such a profound silence upon them. Heigho! poor Mums!"

As there seemed to be no more apparitions to encounter, Frank slowly strolled up the lane leading towards the Hall, where he mused and moralised over the events of the past day. Then changing his route, he walked towards the churchyard, and entering the gate, slowly made the circuit of the old ivied structure, of course pausing longest upon the Rectory side, and probably asking himself whether he ought not to call that night.

But, no, he would not call; for ever since the

race-day he had made himself believe that Madeline had been somewhat cooler towards him ; and off and on he had been suffering from fits, hot and cold fits, such as lovers—most sweetstuffy of words!—sometimes suffer. He never once asked himself whether it was not possible that he might be troubled with a slightly distorting vision and given to being suspicious ; but sighed very deeply, thought himself very much ill-used, and strolled on to the west door, which he found open, and judging that it had been practice-night for the singers, he removed the now extinct pipe from his lips and walked quietly in.

It was dark enough out of doors, but, of course, much more gloomy inside the church ; and upon first entering Frank could discern nothing but the dim outline of the old Saxon pillars which divided nave from aisle ; but all at once he stopped short, with the blood rushing to his face, and a sensation of the most profound misery, as it were, crushing him down. He was now standing so that he could look through the altar-

screen into the chancel, where the harmonium was placed—the instrument whose solemn chords he had listened to Sunday after Sunday, thinking them far beyond those he was accustomed to hear at the university, though, doubtless, a change of players might have altered his opinion.

But the harmonium was silent, though from its metal tongues could no such discord have been produced as now quivered in the breast of Frank Henderson. Here was the realisation of the cold shade which had been at times dimly obscuring his spirit; here was the suspicion verified; and even in his abject misery, Frank hugged himself upon his foresight, and prided himself upon the powerful discernment of his character. All around him was deep shadow; but a small waxlight burned upon the instrument, before which sat the player, with the light shining through her long dark curls. The well-shaped head was half-averted, so that the face was in shadow; but the light shone full upon the broad white forehead and earnest

countenance of Stephen Vaughan, who was leaning forward and saying something in a low voice to apparently not unwilling ears.

Raging with jealousy, Frank stole forward a few steps on tip-toe to hear what was said; then, recovering himself, he shrunk back, scorning his own weakness. Again, torn by conflicting emotions—rage, hatred—he was about to run up the aisle and tell of his contempt and scorn; but, no; he drew back again, for dominating above all was the sense of profound sorrow and wretchedness. His one great idol, the object of his reverence, dashed in an instant from its niche in his breast, and shattered to fragments!

For a moment the place swam before his eyes, and he stood clutching the nearest pew. Was it false—imagination? No; there was the Rembrandt-like picture; and worse, worse still, the half-averted face now turned full upon the speaker, whose voice sounded low, deep, and murmuring, in the arch-roofed chancel. Had it then really come to this, when in spite of jealous doubts he

would have trusted through all, though hundreds had sworn to her falsity, that Madeline was fickle, light, and worthless? Alone with Stephen Vaughan at such a time and place; with the man whose love had long been open and declared. But then this was nothing new. What was he more than another, that his heart should not receive a check?

“Oh Frailty, thy name is Woman!”—the old and hackneyed expression flashed across Frank’s mind as he leaned his head upon the hand which clutched the pew, and groaned aloud in the bitterness of his soul. Then rage once more took possession of him, and he was about to dart forward and upbraid her with her falseness. He could not blame him. Then a new movement on the part of the actors in the little scene before him acted as a check, and he stood motionless, unheeding the light step behind him, and that a dusky figure, with pale face and ashy lips, was watching each gesture, pressing a hand to her side to restrain the

throbbings of her heart, and striving to keep down the choking sensation rising in her throat.

What did she hear and see? Frank groaning and gesticulating at the scene before him, evidently half-mad with rage and jealousy. All flashed before her in a moment, and with a sigh of despair that sounded more like the expiring groan of a breaking heart, she murmured, "Frank, Frank!" and then the weak moment had passed, and the injured woman asserted her sway, as with throbbing temples she recovered herself and would have fled; but trembling with excitement and the revulsion of feeling, half-stunned with surprise, Frank was at her side in an instant, and had caught her in his arms, where, in spite of all struggles, he kept her.

"Oh Maddy, darling!" whispered Frank. "Thank God, thank God! But can you forgive me?"

"Unloose me, sir!" exclaimed Madeline, half-passionately. "How can I?" And then the injured woman gave place to the loving, suffer-

ing heart, and she murmured, "Oh Frank! has it come to this? Are all your words worth no more than that another can cause such feelings as prompted what I have seen to-night. But pray leave me. I feel agitated and ill—and——"

Madeline Glebeley could struggle no more just then, for a dizzy sensation came over her, and for awhile all strength failed, so that she would have fallen; but she was safe, quite safe, and Frank bore her to the door, taking from her hand the music-book she had evidently fetched from the rectory.

'The cool night air soon revived the half-fainting girl, when her first act was to try and free herself from the arm that clasped her waist as they stood together in the doorway.

"Do not repulse me, darling," whispered Frank. "I could not help it. It was a mistake, and I was wrong; but you cannot tell what I suffered in those few minutes."

"What?" cried Madeline, harshly, as she tried hard to gaze in his face. "Suffered!"

she exclaimed again, in an unnatural tone of voice.

"Hush, hush, dearest," whispered Frank; "I know that I should not have doubted you; but I could not help it. Stephen's admiration, the harmonium, the scene so natural, Miss Newman sitting there—so like in the distance. Reason seemed driven away, and I was mad."

A light flashed upon Madeline as she exclaimed, joyfully, "Then you mistook her for me?"

"Indeed, indeed I did," murmured Frank, penitently; "fool that I was! But you will forgive me, darling? Come back and see how easily any one might have been deceived."

But Madeline shrank from joining the couple at the harmonium in her then agitated condition, and strolled with Frank beneath the limes that overshadowed a part of the churchyard. The late autumn night was calm and still, but for the gently sighing breeze that passed softly through the now bare trees, echoing as it

were the murmur of Madeline's voice, as forgiveness was accorded in whispers whose gentle breath swept Frank's cheek, so low, so soft, were the words, and so sweet was the calm that now came upon those breasts—late the scene of a storm that threatened to make shipwreck of their hopes.

The rector must have been having a long nap, while Madeline had gone to practise with her friend, Annie Newman, or else surely he would have begun to fidget for his tea. But with people situated as Frank and Madeline, how Time does hurry away! as though these draughts of love were like dainty liqueurs, and only to be drunk from very tiny glasses. How short he does seem to cut these interviews! it generally appears as though he gave the hour-hands of his keepers a holiday, letting the minute-hands do duty in their places. If it is not so, how are we to account for some of the lapses which take place? Now here, when Frank at last yielded to Madeline's oft-urged request, and accompanied her back to the church, he could not believe that

they had been absent for more than five minutes, little thinking how we live a life in a love, and that nearly an hour had elapsed.

It was quite time they returned, for the wax taper was low down in the socket, though the two figures still occupied the same position, and seemed in happy ignorance of how time had passed.

The music-book was picked up, and then Madeline and Frank stopped to gaze upon the scene in the chancel, which Madeline was compelled to own was enough to deceive her companion.

"But I am fully forgiven?" whispered Frank.

"Yes, if I am," murmured Madeline.

"But what have I to forgive?" said Frank.

"The same suspicion as you allowed entrance," whispered Madeline.


"What?" exclaimed Frank; and then he would have been very demonstrative; but Madeline passed swiftly up the nave, making Annie Newman start from her seat with no doubt a

very rosy flush upon her countenance; but, if so, it was invisible, for just then out went the light, and the party had to feel their way out of the church—Annie having just then awakened to the fact that it must be growing late, and that it was time she hurried home, while faster and faster that stupid little heart of hers would keep going throb, throb, throb, throb! and seeming to say,—

“Love, love; love, love,” or varying it occasionally for,—

“What—would—Gus—say?”


So the ladies were escorted to the rectory gate, where to poor Annie's great disgust she found Miss Cinques's maid, specially retained for the occasion, and waiting to accompany her home, by brother Gus's orders—a meeting with which the former young lady would most willingly have dispensed, for she knew how soon it would come to her brother's ears that she had been out walking with Mr. Stephen Vaughan, although the walk had been but some eighty yards, and the *tête-à-tête*



due to that gentleman having accidentally strolled into the church.

As soon as they were alone, it was surprising how cordial Frank seemed; while, as for Stephen, he was most decidedly see-sawish, which possibly may have accounted for the little attacks of heart-sickness from which he kept suffering. However, Frank's genial humour had its effect, and they stopped talking in the lane for some time upon affairs horsey and canine—Stephen being generally rather given to yawning at the mention of anything literary—and while thus deep on the points of one of the Squire's last foals, Frank gave a start, for the same navy-like figure passed them hurriedly, leaving an impression upon Frank that there was something in the walk he knew.

The foal case having been duly discussed, and the innocent animal's hocks, fetlocks, barrel, withers, setting on of head, and a few other points satisfactorily agreed upon, Frank turned homeward, Stephen likewise, and the latter dreamed that night that he was mourning for



the love of Madeline Glebeley, and that an angel with long black curls, dark eyes, and with such soft cheeks, and long downy pinions, was wiping the tears from his eyes, and just about to press a kiss upon his lips, when in rustled the Reverend Augustus Newman in his long black gown, and took the angel by the wings—as one would handle a dove—placed it upon the harmonium, ascended the pulpit, and then peering at it through an opening in the fretwork altar-screen, preached at the afore-said angel a long, dry sermon, stammering and hammering by the light of one candle—the said sermon containing a great many lies—that is to say, not falsehoods, but fifthlies and sixthlies and seventhlies. Then, when the sermon was about half-finished, the angel gave one flap with its wings, extinguished the candle, and Stephen Vaughan awoke in the dark, to lie pondering upon this vision of the pillow, and thinking that he hardly needed a Daniel of daily life to place the right interpretation thereon. He then wondered whether Frank was awake, and whether he was

thinking of Madeline. Then what Madeline could see in him to like. Then how it would all end; and whether he was not himself cowardly, vacillating, and weak. Then about Alice. Then he sighed three times very loudly, and punched his pillow savagely, as if that comfortable old friend could help it; and then he became aware of the fact that he had been awake quite an hour, to remedy which unpleasant state of affairs he turned upon the other side, and the bed groaned loudly at his weight; after which there was silence in the room till the poor lovesick swain apparently began to relieve his laden or love-stormed heart, for it now seemed attacked on both sides—relieved it by a series of long-drawn groans. Though, if the room had been double-bedded, the chances are nine hundred and ninety-nine to one, that the other inmate would have declared the groans to have been nasal and lung-begotten, for they sounded exceedingly like snores.

CHAPTER VII.

SAMPSON'S FRIEND IN NEED.

WHAT a long essay might be written upon dreaming ; and how interesting it could be made, always supposing the writer to have plenty of faith, and to be a firm disciple of Mrs. Catherine Crowe. Why, a tolerably bulky volume might be written upon dreams ; but then it would be necessary that these visions of the pillow should be transferred to paper the moment the dreamer woke—not always a pleasant duty when mornings were cold and dark—or else they would be liable to lose much of their pungency and flavour, their etherealism, or spiritual carbonic acid gas ; for, doubtless, it has been noticed that vivid and interesting dreams are often very flat after an intervening nap. An author, with an eye to the sensational, might intensify and throw up the

bright parts of his pictures considerably by a careful observance of diet, and a due regard to the state of his health. His dreams might be arranged to a shade with very little difficulty. Steak supper would produce something moderately horrid, according to the toughness of the steak; kidneys, a murder; while gristle, or German sausage, or—better still—Charqui, would bring forth spirits from the vasty deep, at least. It has been said that this plan was adopted by an authoress of a past age; but it is doubtful whether it was ever carried out to anything like its full extent, or reduced to a science with rule and exception. The prime necessary appears to be to shoot the bird flying; and it certainly seems a pity that we cannot take book and pencil to bed, and make notes of our dreams as they glide rapidly before that mental vision that becomes so active while the body lies in torpor.

Frank Henderson had no note-book beneath his pillow when he was dreaming of Madeline, and the tear-wet eyes that he had kissed beneath

the lime-trees; but then he would not have recorded the vision even if he had been so provided; for to him 'twas sacred. The ladies, too, who had assisted at that evening's scene, went wandering away in dreams far on in life, with such stalwart supporters to guide their feet aright, and defend them from all ill. Little Annie Newman was feverish and flushed, and tossed restlessly upon her pillow; for she had listened to Stephen Vaughan as she sat at the harmonium, in an hour when that gentleman had made up his mind to take the good the gods provided him, and sigh no more. Nay, he even went so far as to vow, like a shallow fox, that the grapes he could not reach were sour; and until he came back to his old way of thinking, he spoke in admiration of the newly-found cluster.

And Annie Newman listened—listened to words she had never before heard, though she had read of them with intense interest. She could not have believed how barbed they were, and how they pricked and tingled in her little inexperi-

enced heart, and came humming and flying round her in her dreams—now bringing a smile to her lip, and now making those long dark lashes to be wet with tears, or half-catching sobs to rise from her gentle breast—nearly waking her, and causing her to nestle closer with her hot cheek in the pillow. Ah! Annie's dream that night was somewhat wild, and so tangled that it would have taken a little management to make it intelligible.

We already know the thread of Stephen Vaughan's night thoughts; while, as to those of Mrs. Elton, they were of a very mingled nature, and decidedly not comforting, being, doubtless, prompted by the unpleasant position she occupied in the easy—but to her uneasy—chair by her suffering lord's bedside.

It was somewhere about the wee short hour of one, and the greater part of the inhabitants of Waveley were, like some people here mentioned—plunged in the land of dreams, when Sampson Elton, miller, managed to get himself somehow into a knot, and then to begin groaning most

dismally. Mr. Childe had said that the patient would be upon his back for a month, which was evidently a metaphorical way of saying that he would be an invalid for that space of time; but now he was literally in that nightmare-begetting position, and dreaming, at a terrible rate, horrors of the most horrible description, and such as woke him with a start; woke Mrs. Elton with another; and sent her to spoil Frank's ethereal vision by waking him, to impart the news that Sampson was dying.

Frank replied that he would be with her in a moment; and hurried on his things, to find his mother trembling and wringing her hands.

"Taken worse?" said Frank, hastily.

"Oh, yes! my dear; he say's he's dying; run for Mr. Childe this instant."

A dismal groan, as corroboration of Mrs. Elton's words, now came from the chamber; so Frank ran hastily down stairs and out of the house, nor ceased running till he had reached the doctor's, when he dragged at the bell until

the window was opened and Mr. Childe's night-capped head appeared.

"Will you come on directly?" said Frank, very much out of breath.

"All right," said Mr. Childe. "How's she going on? Mrs. Bloveel, isn't it?"

"Confound it! no;" cried Frank. "Elton's dying."

"The deuce he is," said the doctor. "All right; I'll be there as soon as you are." And then the window was slammed down; and from the passing shadow upon the blind it was evident that Mr. Childe was losing no time in getting on his out-door apparel; so Frank hurried back to the cottage, when, as he approached, he fancied that he again made out a figure leaving the garden; but it was so dark that he could not be sure.

Upon reaching the bed-room and announcing the coming of the doctor, Frank found Sampson groaning fearfully; while Mrs. Elton and Mary were vainly seeking to administer comfort.

"How are you now, sir?" said Frank, approaching the bed.

"Oh!" groaned Sampson, "it's all over with me. But there; I'll forgive you. I'll be Christian-like and pardon you all."

Frank could not see what there was to pardon; but he refrained from speaking, though Mary seemed to think the spirit displayed so sublime that she gave a large sob.

There was no arriving at the principal part of the suffering, nor yet at the injured man's reasons for supposing that dissolution was at hand; but the arrival of Mr. Childe soon put all doubt to flight.

"How long has he been like this?" said the doctor, after a little pulse-feeling and examination.

Mrs. Elton replied, about half an hour; and then, in obedience to an order from the doctor, sent Mary to light the parlour fire.

"Hum!" said Mr. Childe, examining the draught he had sent in the evening, to see how much had been taken.

"Oh-h-h!" groaned Sampson.

"Any more blood appeared?" said Mr. Childe.

Mrs. Elton replied in the negative.

"Cough been violent?"

"No; hardly troubled him at all," said Mrs. Elton.

"Oh-h-h!" groaned Sampson, as if in remonstrance to such an assertion.

"Ha!" said the doctor, taking a little octangular paper-covered bottle from his pocket and shaking it. "Give me a glass and some water."

The glass and water were placed before him, and into a tablespoonful or two of the liquid, the doctor dropped some five-and-twenty drops from his little magic phial, and administered to his groaning patient, afterwards sitting down by the bedside to watch the effect.

Frank gazed with some anxiety in the doctor's face, and received for answer a reassuring nod, accompanied by a gesture inviting him to take a seat.

"You had better sit down, too, ma'am," said Mr. Childe. "He'll be better soon. But, perhaps, you may as well tell the girl we shall want some hot water."

"Oh! yes," exclaimed Mrs. Elton, anxious to do something to be of service—"Oh! yes; for a bath?"

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Childe; "only a small kettleful."

Mrs. Elton hastened out to give her instructions, and when she returned they all sat listening to Sampson's groans; for he kept on giving them vent as hard as he possibly could, and as though determined to groan till the last, and assure himself by their frequency and loudness that he had yet some strength of lung. But it soon became evident that a battle was going on between him and the potent medicine: the groans became less frequent; then more like stertorous breathing; then only occasional sighs; and, at last, Sampson slept easily and tranquilly.

"There," said Mr. Childe, "you may lie down and go to sleep, ma'am. You won't hear from him any more this side of seven o'clock." Saying which, the doctor arranged the clothes a little round his patient, and followed Frank down to the parlour, where they found Mary nodding over a cheerful fire, with the kettle singing upon the hob.

"But had I not better sit up?" whispered Mrs. Elton, from the stairs. "Don't you think he is in danger, doctor?"

"Not a bit," said Mr. Childe. "Go to bed; and you can go, too, young woman; we shan't want you any more to-night."

Mary readily obeyed; and when she had left the room, Frank asked the doctor what he would take.

"Well," said Mr. Childe, rubbing his hands, "I thought, after this turn-out in the night air, a small exhibition of whisky-toddy would be suited to our complaints, so I ordered the hot water, making oneself at home; but old friends, you know, Frank."

The necessary materials were soon upon the

table, and then Mr. Childe, making himself still more at home, prepared two glasses of the comforting beverage, to which he suggested the addition of pipes.

"But about his cough?" said Frank.

"Pooh!" said the doctor; "he'll never know of it. Sound as a church."

So the pipes were produced, and very soon, in spite of the hour, the occupants of the room appeared very comfortable; though anything but like the watchers in a house threatened by death. Frank thought so; and hinted as much.

"Pooh! nonsense;" said Mr. Childe. "Dying? Stuff! not he."

"Why, what was the matter then," said Frank.

"Funk—stew—been dreaming—cowardly old woman. Given him a sedative: nothing else wanted. Guinea for me though. I'm not going to be fetched out of my bed for nothing. Said I was not to be particular to a pound or two; and I'm sure the ease of body and mind I've given him are worth one-and-twenty shillings—eh?"

Frank could not help acquiescing, and Mr. Childe continued—

“Why, he would have given all he possessed just then to be able to feel that he was getting better. Think I shall make it a five-pound note after all.”

Just at that moment, while Mr. Childe had paused to insert his nose in the steaming tumbler before him, a low knock came at the front door, and Frank leaped up—his step-father's visitor immediately occurring to his mind.

“All right,” said Mr. Childe, putting down his tumbler; “that's for me. Expected it, or I should have been off to bed.”

Frank found the doctor right on going to the door, for it was his lad, with a message that he was wanted immediately at the butcher's.

“There we are,” said Mr. Childe, paying attention to his tumbler, after dismissing the lad with word that he would come on directly. “There we are, Master Frank, there's my night's rest gone; but I've had a refresher. Another

guinea ; another christening job for your Puseyite curate friend ; another pupil for Timothy Boreham ; and another young butcher to aid our respected friend Bloveel, for he always has sons. They might well have christened him Jacob, for this is the ninth boy, and he's safe to have the other three. But what a pity it is he will kill such tough mutton. No ; no more, thank you," he continued, finishing his glass. "I must be off ; not that I need hurry, for one's always fetched too soon. Sure to be a boy, I should say. Ah ! you were a fine boy, you were, Frank. Sitting there before that very fire all those years ago—and she said you were—— There, bless my soul, I must be off."

Then the doctor buttoned up his coat, pulled on his gloves, drained the last drops from his toddy glass, and the mill cottage knew him no longer. But Frank refilled his pipe and sat over the fire thinking of the events of the past day ; of the man he had seen hanging about, and what could be his connexion with Sampson.

Then he pondered over the miserable altercations that had of late occurred, and at last began to persuade himself that he really must leave the old place for good, and not return after the next term—his last at Cambridge. His income—private—and a share of the mill profits, would be ample to keep up a small establishment; when, of course, a certain event could come off; and then no more heart-burnings, no more jealousy; all hope, love, and brightness.

What pleasant thoughts a comfortable fire, a pipe, and a glass of whisky-toddy will bring into a man's head; what castle-building they promote. Matters are arranged to a shade, so that nothing can jar; for the wheels of life must roll onward one within another, all smooth, well-oiled, and easily. The whole machine looking bright and attractive; spindles twinkling in their rapid motion; and the thread of life being run off and reeled up fine, smooth, and regular, and free from knot and kink. But then the pipe and glass are deceitful: they do not tell untruths,

but they give comfort while hiding what there is in the background. They present to your gaze a mirror lustrous and gilded ; but they keep out of sight the bits of deal, glue, and canvas daubed with yellow water-colour which make up the back. They give you the human machine spinning its thread ; but never hint at the dust that will fall upon it, the bits of grit which get into the cogs, or the oil that will grow rancid and clog—hindering progress, and making the machine work but with little effect. They never show you the rough portions of the thread, or the tangles and toils into which it has twisted, making sad the heart that has to replace it in its normal state—normal state ? never : for the finely spun, delicate thread gets many a soil and sully from its rough handling. They never show us this, only the bright side. And perhaps it is as well that it should be so ; for there are states of the mind when the truth, in all its rugged reality, would be more injurious than beneficial. An opiate-produced sleep cannot be healthy ; but

there are times when it is life-saving: worn, worried, and perhaps heart-sick with some harass of life, sinking almost beneath the burden, and in dread of the coming day, how soothing and cheering are the creature comforts which set Frank Henderson calculating for the future, and making it all sunshine !


But this sounds like advocating self-deceit, and the making of pitfalls for one's own trapping; so we will even leave Frank to his musings, and begin a fresh chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE COMPLAINT MOST POPULAR.


ONE has heard at different times some rather loud complaints from people of evangelical principles respecting the enforced separation of the sexes in churches of rather high proclivities; and I must confess to having looked rather sour at the verger, or whomsoever might have been the gentleman, that would not allow me to follow Mrs. Scribe into a seat, when in the innocence of my heart I would have done so on my first visit to St. Candlemas Church. For the moment, I was staggered, and mentally rubbed my eyes, to make sure I was neither at Paris, Rouen, nor Amiens. But I have grown older since then—an assertion that may be classed with the axioms of Euclid—and have thought more seriously upon such subjects, so that, if I were possessed

of power in that direction, I don't know that I should stop short where our high-church friends make their halt, but, American in my ideas, I should go to the full extent of my tether. I should be for having churches set apart especially for the sexes, and, as the Reverend Augustus Newman would have done had he been able, should most decidedly do away with pews, and adopt those shabby-looking little rush chairs that creak and scroop on the floor; and, what is more, I should have people to see that those ladies who, like Mrs. Boffin, went in for fashion, contented themselves with one chair, and did not flow over on to another on either side. Yes, I should be for having churches especially set apart for the sexes, and dedicate them to suitable saints. No doubt there would be difficulties arising at first from awkward fathers, blockheaded brothers, and crooked cousins; while mammas, as a class, would be furious; but, as my mission would be against a crying evil, I should not allow myself to be deterred by trifles.



The thief always makes the best thief-taker ; the converted drunkard the best temperance apostle ; and therefore, I, who have long done penance as a Benedict for old sins, ought to make a tolerably good broom for sweeping clean in this instance.

And now for the advantages of masculine and feminine-gendered churches : there would be no more glancing over the tops of prayer-books, unless perchance at fashion as displayed in bonnet, shawl, or dress, on the one hand ; tie, collar, and coat, on the other hand. No more stolen glances ; no more sheep's-eye casting ; no more young gentlemen got up regardless of expense, whose tailors are of the Burgess and Co. persuasion—" fashionable, but very dear ; " no more of those scented dandies slipping shillings into pew-openers' hands—seriously-minded pew-openers' hands—so as to be placed in front seats a long way up the galleries, where they can hear well and be near the reading-desk ? or so that they can look up the church towards the organ, and facing the



bonnets?—who knows? No more idol-worship, and rude pushing to get out in time to make a bow to the idol. No more daring bribery and getting introduced to the vacant seat in the same pew where *she* sits, sending the poor girl into a flutter all through the remainder of the service—not hearing the text, not seeing it, although introduced to her notice by the bold privateer in the family pew; for the Church Service is passed opened at the very spot, and a finger of those primrose gloves is gently touched, nearly causing the book to be dropped, so electrical is the shock; not understanding a word of the discourse for thinking what would papa say!—what would mamma think!—and whether sisters Helena and Blanche have any suspicions! “Oh, dear!” tries to rise in the shape of a sigh, but is promptly crushed down, and then the little sinner thinks of how wicked it is, yet how nice! how terribly shocking, and yet how agreeable! She cannot turn her eyes in that direction, for his are burning a hole right through the little

lace bonnet she wears. But at last, just as the service is concluded, indignation gets the upper hand, and though privateer the daring stays to hold open the pew-door, he gets no reward, not even a look; for he was very naughty, and deserves to be punished.

I should put a stop to that sort of thing.

Another advantage. We should not have Percy Poidevine Plantagenet, who gives the whole of his mind to those superb whiskers, and always stands close to the pew-door, with one arm reaching over into the nave-aisle, although there is plenty of room for it inside—we should not have Percy as he stands half-face totally ignoring all of his own sex; all mammas and aunts; all maidens of a certain age; and all the rest of the folk who want seats, because he is so intent upon his thin gilt-cross and red-edge waistcoat-pocket edition Prayer-Book in diamond type, but of which he cannot read a word on account of the glass stuck in his eye and producing a temporary obliquity of vision, of which

he is happily in ignorance, from the simple fact that though he has practised before the mirror, yet so screwing up is the operation, that he never yet obtained a fair look at himself, or probably he would not attempt it again. So intent is he, that nothing can move this modern St. Anthony till the particular devil tempts him for whom he has been waiting all this time, keeping his house swept and garnished for her reception as she comes in the shape of some blooming girl of tolerable *tournure* and attractions—of course not an *habitué* of the well-filled church—when with what grace and ease the pew-door is opened, the hat removed from beneath the seat, and the sitting resigned to the fair one, who bows acknowledgment, while the Plantagenet takes his stand in the aisle, keeping guard as it were over the fair occupant of his seat.

That sort of thing would be stayed; while, by a judicious arrangement, it would be as well not to have any good-looking young curates for foolish girls to fancy they had fallen in love with,

inflating themselves with a sentimental, semi-religious enthusiasm, dashed with the tender passion and romance, so that at last they imagine that they must go district-visiting, and take great interest in the Flannel-Shirt Club; when, if the handsome curate left the place—— How then? No one fell in love with the Reverend Augustus Newman; though it was hinted that the fair Miss Cinques had a *penchant* in that direction, and neglected her cat; but I feel bound to say that she met with no encouragement.

Now the Reverend Charles Glebeley was not the man to introduce any such innovations and unrubric-like proceedings into his church, even if it were decided that they were needed. But my arrangement would have necessitated the building of another edifice—rather a costly proceeding, and yet some alteration seemed necessary at Waveley, for any thinking person must have decided that the sooner certain young people attending the old church were married and settled the better.

Frank Henderson, secure as he was of Madeline's affection, ought decidedly to have acted differently, and not have sat there continually striving to catch a glance of his loved one's dark eye; and besides, he ought to have grown tired of trying, from the ill-success of his endeavours—but he did not. As for Stephen Vaughan, his conduct was abominable. If it is allowable to make a new adjective, we will call him *vane*—that is to say, weather-cockish; for all through the standing parts of the service he gazed at Annie Newman; and all through the sitting parts, when that young lady was invisible, he fixed his eyes upon Madeline Glebeley, whom he could just see in her seat in the chancel when the harmonium curtains were not drawn. And thus he would sit with his rapt look, until Alice kicked him on the sly with her little boot; when he coloured, bit his lip, and looked vicious.

Now although all this sort of thing might have been—ought not—but might have been excused during a discourse from the Reverend Augustus,

into which he dragged all the early fathers of the church, all the saints, and all the heresies—Gnostic, Pelagian, Arian, and all, to the very great apparent discomfort of his superior, as shown by the way in which he rubbed his ear;—now, although all this might have been excused at such a time, yet during one of Mr. Glebeley's simple, heart-touching sermons, it was most unpardonable, and ought to have been stopped.

Madeline did talk about it to Frank, and very seriously too. Then he promised amendment most faithfully, all the while pleading such an excuse, that his mentor could not help smiling. Then too he said that he must have picked up loose habits at college, for at chapel the undergraduates were not at all particular, but learned articles, read church history, or ground up Paley during the service.

"But surely you never did so," exclaimed Madeline.

"Now there," said Frank, "you must not be

too hard upon a fellow; I've faithfully promised amendment, so be content. It isn't fair to touch upon the old failings."

"But you will mind, Frank," said Madeline.

"Why, I've promised," said Frank; "but really I fancy that I must buy an indulgence, for I'm sure that I shall break faith. How is it possible for me to do otherwise?"

Something more was said, but what, this chronicler knoweth not; while by another strange coincidence, Stephen Vaughan was being taken to task upon this self-same subject at the Hall, by sister Alice, who ruled over the big fellow like a small tyrant, and uttered such dire threats against him if he dared to mutiny, or tried in desperation to leave the room, that the poor fellow sat as quiet as a tame elephant; for he knew well enough that it would be better to suffer the pricks and stings in private, than to be tortured and goaded almost to madness by hearing them in public.

"Now tell me this instant, sir," said

Alice, "don't you think that you are a great stupid?"

"Yes, very," said Stephen quietly, and greatly to the little querist's surprise.


"Well, I'm glad that you own to it," said Alice, "but why don't you act differently? I haven't patience with you men: you have no more pride in you than—than—than nothing at all," said the little maid, quite at a loss for a simile. "Why can't you see Maddy does not, and never will, care for you a bit?"

"Ah!" groaned Stephen.

"Ah! indeed," exclaimed Alice. "Sighing like that. I declare if ever you do it again I'll tell Annie Newman, and I'll tell her too how you sit watching Maddy in church till I'm quite ashamed of you, and I won't allow it any more."

"Well, what do I care for Miss Newman?" said Stephen, with a growl.

"Oh! nothing at all, of course; but I haven't a bit of patience with such double dealing. Of course you don't care what Miss Newman hears.



But I say, Stevey, can she play the harmonium very nicely?"

"How should I know?" growled Stephen.

"Oh! no; of course you wouldn't know," laughed Alice, mischievously. "She could not play because you put the candle out."

"'Pon my soul I didn't," said Stephen, earnestly, and quite thrown off his guard. "'Pon my soul I didn't. It went out. But who told you?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Alice, "I know. You must be more careful, Stevey, or you will be taken to task by Saint Augustus himself. He will be inviting you to his lodgings, and asking what are your intentions; and then my great goose of a brother will twiddle his thumbs and look silly; and then say that he don't know himself until Miss Madeline Glebeley is married and settled, when he will be sure that his last chance is gone in that quarter, and may perhaps know his intentions."

"Get out," said Stephen, though in his own

mind he could not help thinking that such a contingency was possible, and this made him pass by the latter part of his sister's remark without notice.

"But, Stevey," said Alice, "what would mamma say, if she knew about your being so long in that church with Annie? I've a good mind to ask her what she thinks of it all."

"Don't be a little fool!" said Stephen, politely.

"Very pretty that, sir, to your sister," said Alice, with a toss of her head. "Pray do you ever make use of that elegant expression to either of the ladies of your heart?"

Stephen did not condescend to answer, so his tormentor continued,

"Now, Steve, I mean you to promise me that you will not be playing double any more; and if you don't promise, I mean to have a long talk to Annie about you; for really, sir, I cannot have her trifled with."

"Hum!" said Stephen, who, bothered as he

was, yet had an eye to the ridiculous, and tried hard to turn the tables upon his sister. "Now, then, a little more."

"A little more what, sir?" said Alice, disdainfully.

"Puff!" said Stephen; "the bull was bigger than that."

"What do you mean, you stupid thing?" said Alice.

"Frog in the fable imitating the bull, my dear. Puff away, for a long time yet."

"I don't mean to puff you, sir," said Alice; "but I will not let you make Annie uncomfortable, if you are still going on to be so silly about Maddy. I've watched you, Sunday after Sunday, until I declare that it's quite shocking; and I'm sure, if I were Frank, I should knock your head off. Now—once more, sir,—if you don't promise me that you will be quite straightforward, and act as you should do, I certainly will tell Annie all about your goings on."

"No you won't," said Stephen.

"Indeed, but I will!" cried Impetuous.

"And suppose I retaliate?" said Stephen, "and begin talking about how fond somebody else was of somebody?"

"I don't mind a bit if you do, sir; for I'm not ashamed of it one bit. And if he likes Maddy better than me, I was not going to sit and sigh and be miserable about it. Frank was open, and manly, and straightforward, and never professed what he did not feel, so I should not mind at all, for Frank and I quite understand one another. But I'm not afraid of that: for you would not do so, for fear of hurting my feelings; there, now."

Stephen could not get on. In all his games of verbal chess with his sister he was very soon checkmated, or had to retreat up in a corner, vainly endeavouring to get out, or see a move that might save him. But his little adversary was too sharp, and, one by one, took all his best pieces, and when she considered that he was sufficiently weakened, gave him the *coup de grace*.

Poor Stephen! he often left with crest drooping, eyes dull, and the wonted fire most thoroughly slaked. There was no mistake about the matter—Stephen was a terrible coward in matters moral. He could face danger as well as most men, and therefore was not thoroughly a coward; but in those affairs which a little dash and effrontery would have carried him well through—especially such as related to the tender passion—he was the incarnate essence of poltroonery. Alice had only to throw the silken cord of love around his neck, and so morally lasso him, when he followed her about like a dog; and however much his spirit might resent the light bond, it was as strong to him as if it were a chain forged of the finest Swedish iron. When alone, he would sigh about it dreadfully, and determine to break the fetter—he would have no more of it. Frank might rest happy in his love, and he would look on unmoved, and then all would be right, and he should be at peace, and so on.

It generally took him a week to work himself

up to this pitch. Beginning on Monday, after a sleepless night, he would strengthen in his intention day by day, so that on Saturday he would be quite vigorous in his determination, and hum over

“Shall I, wasting in despair.”

But it was all of no avail, for Sunday came again. If he had been blindfold, it would have been all right; but though love is said to be blind, Stephen Vaughan was not, and he could not go to church with a handkerchief tied over his eyes; so he used to sit and gaze at Madeline, and then, one by one, all his good resolutions used to melt away like snow in sunshine, or, as truthfully, but more homely, like an ice-cream in a hot room; and when the service was over, he was as bad as ever, and with all his work to go over again.

Yet Stephen Vaughan was mentally blindfold, or he never would have acted as he did. He was doubly blind, or surely he would have, as before said, taken the good the gods provided him. He certainly did try to take it, but in so undecided a manner, that the good—that is to say, Miss

Annie Newman—used sometimes to suspect, like the satyr of old—unhappy simile!—that the gentleman was blowing hot and cold in the same breath: Still the maiden could not bring herself to believe that the sweet words she had heard were meaningless; and yet, why had the speaker seemed ashamed of them ever since? That was a puzzle, and it troubled the fair querist; so, finding it easier to go with the stream, she allowed the bandage of the imp-like god to cover the dark eye that had been getting just a peep at the truth from beneath the bandage, just where it was a little on one'side, through the chubby savage having tied it so viciously tight, and then and there the poor girl gave herself up to the new sensation, and believed in the great sighing monster.

Of course there was good reason for Alice to prick and goad her brother; talk of his wickedness in church, and declare that it was a shame. But Stephen's was a deep wound, and one that could not be cured at once. There were sure to

be relapses and breakings-out; while, judging from appearances, it seemed that one idol was gradually ousting the other out; and if Annie had been of a different complexion, and not had eyes and hair so much like those of Madeline, doubtless the cure might have been effected much more rapidly, and with less pain to the sufferer.

It was well for Stephen that he possessed such a mentor or tormentor as his sister, for she did much towards making him follow the right path, acting as what the doctors would call a good healthy stimulus, and waking him briskly to a sense of duty. She was but little, and certainly very young; but, like the pirate-captain in the Christmas tale, she had a very large soul; and, besides, had she not been smitten with the same complaint as her brother?—Had it fully, and then successfully combated it and cured herself? The little god had scaled the fortress of her heart, taken possession, and for a while led her about in chains; but only for a time: the great soul in the little body had revolted—successfully revolted

—and driven out the intruder, upon whom she now looked down in triumph, and smiled at him defiantly.

But Cupid lifted one side of his bandage, winked knowingly, said "*pro tem.*" in Greek; and then began digging another mine with one of his arrows.

CHAPTER IX.

SAMPSON'S LEVÉE.

Doctors differ, so 'tis said, and very often it is the case ; besides which, they do not always prove true prophets. Mr. Childe said that Sampson would be upon his back for a month. But Mr. Childe was wrong ; for, before a fortnight had elapsed, Sampson was down in the little parlour again, without any marks of his late accident showing themselves. But for all that, the miller was not the thing. Like the rest of mortals, he possessed nerves ; and these nerves had received a shock ; the consequence being that, now Sampson was getting a little better, his temper was getting a little worse ; so that as far as the comfort of the cottage was concerned, it would have been more pleasant had no accident occurred. After two or three interviews with his master

concerning matters of grindery, Solid Mahogany came away shrugging his shoulders to such an extent that he looked quite warped. The other men in the mill trembled to think of the time when Sampson should resume his sway; and when orders came per Mary, sad tales were told of the state of affairs in-doors. Mrs. Elton must have been on the high road to dissolution—that is to say, dissolving away, not dying; for she was in tears from morning till night. But Frank rigorously kept to his resolve, to interfere no more while at the cottage, and preserved a strict neutrality. And friend Sampson, being shrewd enough to guess at his intentions, took especial delight in making himself ten times more disagreeable than was customary, if it were possible.

The miller sat in the large easy-chair, and glared at his wife, who was pretending to be very busy making and mending; but instead of working, she was all the time in a great state of trepidation; and, to use her

own expression, "wondering what would come next."

"Now, then," shouted Sampson, in no invalid tone of voice, "where's the hot water?"

Mrs. Elton let fall her work, and hurried out of the room; returning directly after, driving in Mary bearing the copper kettle, which she placed upon the hob, and then stood staring, and breathing very hard.

"Be off!" growled the master. And Mary was off, and apparently very glad of it.

"Now, then," said Sampson again, "where's the gin?"

The spirit-stand and accessories were hurriedly placed upon the table, and Mrs. Elton proceeded tremblingly to mix a tumbler of the steaming beverage, making the neck of the decanter clatter against the side of the glass, and then scalding one of her fingers with the hot water; but at last concluding the mixing, handed the glass to her lord.

Sampson took the glass and stirred it for

some time, and then very naturally proceeded to taste it.

“Bah! what do you call this?” he growled.

“Sweet hot water—Yah!”

“But, my dear,” said Mrs. Elton, “Mr. Childe said—weak——”

“Hang Mr. Childe!” snarled Sampson.

“Weak, indeed! I’m weak enough. Pass that bottle over;—d’ye hear?”

Mrs. Elton obeyed; and Sampson the weak, stiffened the contents of the tumbler.

“Now, then,” growled the amiable, “bring that letter here, and I’ll read it over again.”

Mrs. Elton went to the bureau, brought out a letter that had arrived by the morning’s post, and handed it to her lord, who proceeded to read it for the third time that day.

“Ah!” exclaimed Sampson, when he had finished, and was smoothing out the paper on the arm of his chair. “I’ll give it him! I’ll let him know what it is to humbug me in that way—a scoundrel. Told me in my own office,”—as

if that aggravated the offence—"Told me in my own office, that he could meet the bill if I would draw at three months: and now, after I've favoured the rascal like that, the bill comes back—and when I had paid it away as good paper, too, hang him! Here, you: get out a sheet of paper and write to Deedes. I'll have a writ out directly. Eight-and-thirty pun ten six—a whining, doughy-headed cur. But I'll have him down here first; and then see if he don't begin snivelling about his wife and children. Here, write to him, instead. Ah! what are you up to? not on that new sheet of paper. Here's half-a-sheet on this note—tear it off. Quite good enough for him. Say, he's to come here directly; and then send Jem with it. Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

Sampson then had a fit of coughing;—not a bad fit, but one that he made the most of;—with plenty of "oh's!" and "ah's!" and "dear me's!" and "oh, lord's!" &c. &c.; carefully examining his handkerchief afterwards, to see if there was any bleeding; and then holding up one hand to

see how much he could make it shake. After a while, he took the gin-and-water, his nerves being so shaken that his poor hand trembled to that degree that the spoon clattered, and a few drops—very few, though—were allowed to fall upon the carpet. But somehow or another, when the glass came nearer to the invalid's mouth, it was perfectly steady, and remained so while he drank.

Mrs. Elton wrote the required missive, which was destined for the village baker, and was about to place it in an envelope, when Sampson arrested her.

“There—you needn't waste an envelope over him; he's not worth it;—and it does not matter if the note is read. He'd no business to dishonour the bill. I don't care who knows.”

Mahogany Jem was summoned, and despatched with the note, which he took, grumbling all along the lane at being made an errand boy; and in about half an hour a very diffident knock came at the front door of the cottage.

“Here,” said Sampson, “let him wait a moment while you put the spirits away, and have the kettle moved.” Then he took a large gulp out of his glass. “Put this in the sideboard cupboard till he is gone.”

The table was cleared, and the glass of gin-and-water concealed before the visitor was admitted—a thin, anxious-looking, pale-faced man with floury clothes, and bearing the stamp of hot oven and watching in every lineament of his countenance. He then made a very humble bow to the occupants of the room; coughed twice behind his hat; and stood waiting to be asked to sit down, but he waited in vain.

“Oh! how de do, Mr. Twist?” said Sampson, and then in a breath to his wife, “get out pen and ink and write a receipt for the amount of Mr. Twist’s bill, that came back to-day. Forgot it, didn’t you, Mr. Twist?”

Mr. Twist twisted. Poor fellow! he was not very likely to have forgotten a three months’ bill—one which he told his wife had been in bed

with him every night in the shape of a nightmare.

"Very sorry, sir," he muttered: "several accounts promised, and been disappointed—people so thoughtless—but hope you'll renew it, sir."

"What! not prepared?" exclaimed Sampson, with well-feigned surprise. "You don't mean that you have not brought the money, Mr. Twist, surely. I always placed so much dependence in you."

"Really, sir," stammered the poor fellow, "very sorry; but been obliged to pay my rent, and then lost those two pigs, sir; and can't get money in."

"Dear, dear, dear!" groaned Sampson; "and cash so scarce. Large payments to make too. It's enough to drive one to give up business, what with accidents, and ill-health, and money matters. Of course this bill and expenses must be paid. How much have you brought then?"

"Really, sir, I hardly know what to say, or

how to tell you," said the poor baker; "but I have not a single sovereign towards——"

"Not *what?*" cried Sampson, feigning astonishment. "But there; you're joking, Mr. Twist."

"No; indeed, sir," exclaimed the poor fellow, sadly; "and I've been hoping that you would renew it."

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Sampson, as if pushed to the very verge of despair. "Quite impossible, quite. And you a man in whom I placed so much confidence. Well, I'm very sorry, Mr. Twist, but it is what I have always been told, and I had no business to trust you. But then I always was so weak upon that score, and never would stick to cash transactions. Well, there's no help for it; *I* can't meet the payment. Perhaps I might have done a five-pound note towards it, or with a little screwing the odd eight pun ten. I suppose a writ must issue, and of course I'm very sorry. Don't let me keep you any longer, Mr. Twist."

"But if you could renew it, sir," said the miserable debtor, looking quite dismayed.

"Quite impossible," said Sampson, feebly. "But I'm so ill that I can't enter into it any more. I'm quite upset now. My dear, will you show Mr. Twist out, and give me my medicine."

The wretched man cast an appealing glance at Mrs. Elton as she opened the door, and then walked away with his hat over his eyes, thinking of his wife and children; the unequal distribution of this world's goods; and asking himself whether it would not be better to cease bearing fardels, and, popping into the deep mill-dam, end his woes at once.

When Mrs. Elton re-entered the room she gave Sampson his "medicine," which had been concealed in the sideboard cupboard, and then helped him to replenish the glass; during which process the invalid seemed to recover strength very rapidly, and sat chuckling and rubbing his knees as he gazed in the fire; after which he set to and hammered an obstinate knob of coal, just

as he had mentally hammered the head of poor Twist.

“A scoundrel,” he snarled; “I’ll give him such a dose as will teach him what’s what. Here, you; sit down and write to Deedes, and ask him to please call here directly.”

Mrs. Elton obeyed her lord, and in this instance she was allowed to enclose her note in an envelope, and direct it to D. Deedes, Esq., solicitor, when this missive was despatched per Mary.

In a short time Mr. Deedes arrived—very smiling, very hand-rubby, and agreeable, having made up his mind that he was required to draw up Sampson’s will.

After the customary salutations, and they had told one another what sort of weather it was—decidedly a work of supererogation—Sampson opened the business by saying that he wanted a writ issued directly for poor Twist.

Mr. Deedes’ countenance gradually elongated, as he saw the will fade away into nothingness.

"You want me to write to him for payment," said Mr. Deedes.

"No, I don't," said Sampson, shortly; "I know what I want without you telling me. I want you to issue a writ."

"But it's always customary, my dear sir, to send a letter or two first. Sharp practice is sharp practice, you know; but we don't like to be too cutting;" and then Mr. Deedes looked smilingly round at Mrs. Elton, who dared not meet his eye, so he smiled approbation of his own remark at the big china punchbowl.

"Oh! you don't like to be too cutting, don't you?" said Sampson; "well I do. I want you to issue a writ for eight-and-thirty pun ten six, and expenses, now directly, agen Isaac Twist, baker, Waveley; that's what I want."

"Poor man—wife—very large family—not like you—no children," hinted Mr. Deedes, quietly.

"Deal too large for a man in his circumstances," snarled Sampson. "Men like him

have no business to have a large family and get into debt. I don't have a pack of children round me."

Mr. Deedes looked as if he thought it a great blessing for posterity that Mrs. Elton was childless, especially if the offspring were likely to take after their father; but he did not say so—merely remarking,—

"I should give him a little time, I think."

"Humph!" said Sampson.

"Struggling man, you know—very industrious—can't always get in money when they like—little tradesmen—people very thoughtless, and often offended if they are asked for what they owe. And, by-the-by, I owe the poor man over five pounds, and he sent a line to ask for it. Quite slipped my memory."

"Better pay it me, then," said Sampson.

"Write Mr. Deedes out a receipt, my dear."

But Mr. Deedes could not see it, and asked Sampson if he were authorised to give a receipt.

"Not legal; not legal, my dear sir. Well

then you'd like me to write him a line asking payment, eh? How long will you give him? Say a fortnight. Honest man, you know."

"Writ for eight and thirty pun ten six, and expenses, agen Isaac Twist, baker——"

"Yes, yes, my dear sir, I understand," said Mr. Deedes; "but in such a case as this you know that no respectable attorney will issue a writ at once. And knowing as I do the ins and outs of the matter, and the man's solvency if time is allowed, I can't help feeling a little reluctance in proceeding to extremities."

"Writ for eight and——"

"No, no, my dear sir, you don't mean it. Letter first and a fort——"

"Writ for eight and——"

"You really must excuse me, Mr. Elton," said the lawyer, rising. "Only too happy to wait upon you; but—compelled—decline—act—good day—day, Mrs. Elton."

"Yah-h-h!" snarled Sampson, as the door closed upon the man of law. "Thin-skinned,

foxy humbug. Wouldn't be so sparing with me, I know. What did he mean by laying such stress on my having no children? What does he know about it?" said the miller to himself, and then turning very thoughtful. Then rousing up again he shouted, "Here, you; write and tell that baker to come back again."

The note was sent, and, soon after, poor Twist re-appeared, looking paler than ever; for he had been having a scene at home: nothing of any importance, only one of those little miseries which take place in poor men's homes when the world has gone hard with them in spite of all struggles; and when in company with their mates they think of the coming storm, and the probable tearing up of their little nest.

"Ho!" exclaimed Sampson, as Twist entered. "I'm a little better now; and I've been thinking that perhaps I might manage to renew that bill for a couple of months, if you would honestly try and meet it then."

"Indeed—indeed, sir," cried the man joyfully,

"I will lose no chance of getting the money in ; and if nothing else turns up, I'll sell the horse and cart."

"Ah, just so," said Sampson ; "I'm sure I don't want to be hard, and am willing to help you all I can, as you must know by the credit I have given you."

"Yes, sir," said poor Twist, wincing ; "and I am indeed most grateful."

"Well then," said Sampson, "we'll have a fresh bill drawn up. I must charge you with interest, you know. I can't do less in justice to my wife and family—I mean to Mrs. Elton."

"Must you, sir ?" said Isaac Twist, with a countenance rather less joyful in aspect.

"Oh, yes !" said Sampson, "I couldn't do otherwise. It ought to be at the rate of ten per cent., but I don't want to be hard ; I'd sooner lose myself. So we'll say seven and a half."

Twist gave something like a groan, as though a very large molar was being scrunched out, when he said,—

"Can't you make it five, sir? Very poor man, you know."

"Now there," whined Sampson; "I want to make things easy for you and all to my own loss, and then you try to impose upon my good nature. What's the good of the bit of paper to me? I daren't pay it away after what happened with this last one. I don't want to draw; it's the money I want, only I thought two months would give you time to turn round a bit."

"Oh yes, sir! thank you, sir," cried the poor fellow. "Say seven and a half then."

"I don't understand these things, and wouldn't be mixed up in 'em if I could help it; but I suppose they charge as much as twenty sometimes; though I'm sure I don't know how they can have the heart." And here Sampson looked the incarnation of benevolence, while the poor baker lost another tooth apparently.

"And you'll pay cash for what more flour you want?" said Sampson.

"Yee-e-es, sir," said the debtor, as plainly

as he could speak, considering how hard he was held by the throat.

"Let's see, then," said Sampson, as in obedience to sundry gestures Mrs. Elton drew a stamp from his pocket-book, and prepared to write. "Let's see — eight-and-thirty pun ten six, interest to add is eight-and-thirty shillings, and eight-and-thirty sixpences, is two pun seventeen, and ninepence for the ten shillings, and sixpence for the stamp, makes altogether two pun eighteen and threepence. Now you'd better pay that interest down, Mr. Twist. You can do that?"

Mr. Twist made a negative movement.

"Oh, very well; I don't want to be hard, Mr. Twist," whined Sampson. "I'm sure I'd forgive you the debt, if I could do it in justice to my family—my wife I mean to say. There, let's see," adding up:—"Eight-and-thirty pun ten, and two pun eighteen and threepence, is forty-one pun eight and threepence. Now, then," he continued to Mrs. Elton, "put that down as I

tell you :—Waveley, November 27th, 18—. Two months after date——”

“Couldn’t you make it into two bills, sir; at two and three months?” pleaded the debtor.

“Now, how can you be so unreasonable?” whined Sampson. “Here have I been——”

“Never mind, sir; please go on,” murmured poor Twist, mumbling as though his jaws were toothless, and he was now down upon his gums.

“Pay to my order,” continued Sampson, “forty-one pun, eight shillings, and three pence, for value received. Here, I’ll sign it,” he continued, leaning over, and making his autograph upon the precious document. “Why, you haven’t put who it’s to,” he snarled.

“But you didn’t tell me, dear,” pleaded Mrs. Elton.

“Yah!” snarled Sampson, pushing the bill across the table. “Now, then. To Mr. Isaac Twist, Baker, Waveley.”

Mrs. Elton made the required addition, and

then handed the document back, when Sampson found that she had smeared his name, a discovery producing a look which sent her shivering out of the room.

The bill was then accepted in a very trembling hand; and poor Twist went off home, reprieved for a couple of months, at the expense of paying for the indulgence at the rate of forty-five per centum per annum, which, taking into consideration that it was a favour, was rather a high rate for a poor man to pay, and perhaps likely to interfere with his prospects of getting a living. But then, it is no new fact to advance, that the borrower is slave to the lender, and Isaac Twist, baker, Waveley, was in this case somewhat of a borrower.

Sampson had not been alone more than ten minutes, before he had another visitor, in the shape of Mr. Childe, who had now taken to only one call per diem.

“Well, and how are we now?” said the doctor, rubbing his hands.

"Ah, I shall do now, I suppose," said Sampson. "You needn't call any more."

"Certainly not, if you feel sufficiently recovered. But how is your appetite? Good? Ah! I should keep on with the bark. You require tonics."

Sampson might have required tonics; but decidedly he required no bark—his snarl was bad enough.

"You needn't send any more stuff," said Sampson surlily, "for I shan't take it."

"Just as you like, my dear sir," said Mr. Childe; and then, after inquiring about Mrs. Elton's health, he took his leave, humming over the old rhyme—

" When the Devil was sick,
The Devil a priest would be ;
But when the Devil got well,
The devil a priest was he "—

while Sampson sat making plans for his campaign as soon as he was out, which he meant to be in the course of a day or two, for he felt decidedly

better after his interview with Twist, the baker. He had managed a nice little bit of business there; and, after lying in bed for nearly a fortnight without directly screwing a sixpence out of anybody, this little bit of scheming was quite refreshing, and made him defy the doctor and all his doings. He had been growing tired; for day after day there had been no one to talk to or abuse but his wife; and though it was very satisfactory to always have some one within call to bear the brunt of his ill humour, yet he had grown tired of bullying his uncomplaining wife, and, like the classic general, longed for something new to conquer. Twist's affair had come in most *apropos*; for, on the whole, Sampson was rather pleased than otherwise that the bill had not been met: he knew that he was pretty safe with the man, who was compelled to obtain his flour at the mill; while, leaving out the little snack of interest, there was to be ready money for all future transactions; his own price to charge for such dealings; and his customer

afraid to complain so long as the miller held that bill which was certain not to be taken up when it fell due ; but whether lessened a little, or increased by interest, hanging heavily upon the poor baker's back for months to come.

So Sampson sat and imbibed gin-and-water, and chuckled, for he had got rid of the doctor, too, which was another good stroke of business ; but then his bill would be a woefully long one, and the thoughts of it sent the chuckles backwards, making him cough and wheeze terribly for quite a quarter of an hour. And this had the effect of completely driving away his amiability, besides making him squint more villainously than ever ; whilst it was just as he was recovering that Mrs. Elton re-entered the room.

" Oh ! you're there, are you ? " growled Sampson. " I suppose I might have choked and coughed myself into a corpse before you would have come to see how I was."

" Indeed, dear," cried Mrs. Elton, " I was up-stairs, and did not hear you. I was seeing

to your bed, and having it made comfortable. I've had everything changed, and——"

"Ah, I suppose so," said Sampson; "and now you want to get me in it again to stay there altogether! But I'm not a-going to,—there now. P'raps you'd like to be a widow again, eh? P'raps you'd like to wherrit me into my grave, like you did that other one of yours, eh? But it won't do this time. It won't do this time, I say! D'ye hear? I'm all right again, and I don't mean to put up with it. D'ye hear now, eh?"

Poor Mrs. Elton could hear plainly enough; but she could not speak. The allusion made to her first husband carried with it such a sting, that as she made the comparison of past and present, the tears came into her eyes; while Sampson's twinkled again, and there was a symptom of a chuckle in his throat; but only for an instant,—for he turned pale at the thought of the last fit of coughing, and wiped his pale lips to see if there were any traces of blood upon them.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, after a pause. "What

did old Vaughan want here the other day while I was upstairs ? ”

“ Old Vaughan, dear ? ” said Mrs. Elton, for a moment forgetting the circumstance.

“ Yes, old Vaughan,” said Sampson. “ What did he want ? ”

“ Oh, he called to pick up Frank, to take him to Edgeton.”

“ Like his insolence,” growled Sampson. “ A thick-headed, pompous, purse-proud, old upstart. He wouldn’t have dared to come if I had been up. What was that they said about Long Meadow ? ”

“ Oh, only about what a state it was in,” said Mrs. Elton, innocently. “ Mr. Vaughan said it was a pity it was not seen to, for it would soon be a mass of thistles.”

“ Oh, he did, did he ? ” said Sampson. “ And pray, what had Mr. Frank Henderson to say to that, eh ? ”

Mrs. Elton saw that she had been saying more than would tend to the comfort of all con-

cerned; and now wanted to turn exceedingly reticent. But it was too late; and besides, she was about as poor a dissimulator as ever tried to throw dust in the eyes of a human being. So she hesitated, stammered, and then turning very red in the face, said—

“I don’t recollect,” which was a terrible fib, since she perfectly well remembered all that had taken place; and also recalled to mind how she had crossed the room on tip-toe to shut the staircase door, for fear that the words might ascend to Sampson’s chamber, where she fondly hoped her tyrant slept.

But Sampson happened to have been very wide awake upon that day; quite as wide awake as he was upon the present occasion, when he could see that his partner was trying to keep something back. The consequence was, that he drew his pleasant-looking mouth much tighter than usual, so that it resembled a sewn-up cut across his face, and said very softly—

“Oh, you don’t remember, don’t you?”

"N-n-n-ooo," stammered Mrs. Elton.

Sampson gave his chair a vigorous push back, so as to confront his wife, and in so doing kicked down the poker and tongs, thereby making Mrs. Elton almost perform that popular feat known as jumping out of her skin, as she gazed with dread on the vicious-looking being before her.

"Now then," he snarled, just as if at the next instant he would bite. "Now then, what did he say?"

Mrs. Elton made another feeble effort to keep back her son's remark, and gasped out—

"Who, dear?"

"Who?" growled Sampson, perfectly atrocious in his aspect. "Oh, you don't know, of course! Why, that puppy of yours. What did he say, eh?"

Mrs. Elton felt herself—to use the Americanism—regularly treed: and after one or two imploring looks, which might just as well have been directed at the table, she hurriedly exclaimed, just as her lord made a feint of coming at her—

"He said that it was—was—was—was—"

"Wuzz, wuzz, wuzz, wuzz," cried Sampson, mimicking. "Why the deuce don't you speak, and not stand there buzzing like an old humble bee."

"Was—was very disgraceful," cried poor Mrs. Elton, for all the world like a racked martyr.

"Ho!" cried Sampson, "he did, did he? Then—well, what do you want?" he said, abruptly, as Mary entered the room; and then seeing, or just remembering that her master was there, trying to retreat.

"Please, sir," stammered Mary, "missus wants to see Mrs. Graves. No; I mean, as Mrs.—Mrs. Graves wants to see missus."

"Tell her to come in then," said Sampson.

Mary left upon her errand, and directly after ushered in Mrs. Graves, wife of Bill Graves, of poaching habits.

Mrs. Graves made a series of very polite curtseys to both parties, and then took to examining the pattern of the wall paper.

"Oh!" grunted Sampson, "I suppose you have

come to pay up that bit of back rent, eh? I'm very glad of it, Mrs. Graves, for I meant to have given you a look in as soon as I could."

"N-n-no, sir; please, I didn't," said Mrs. Graves. I just came in to speak a minute to missus."

"Well," said Sampson, "then you had best speak to her."

Mrs. Elton rose to leave the room with the new comer; but that proceeding did not happen to be in accordance with the master's ideas.

"You needn't mind me," said he, grimly; "Mrs. Elton keeps nothing back from me, Mrs. Graves," and then he leered at his wife.

Mrs. Elton came directly to a full stop, and in obedience to her ruler's nod, re-seated herself; while Mrs. Graves looked at her, and began to plait her apron, wearing all the time anything but a cheerful aspect.

"Well, Mrs. Graves," said Sampson, "you had better speak at once, for Mrs. Elton is busy."

Mrs. Graves looked from Sampson to his wife,

and then back again ; for she found no comfort, nor, in fact, anything else in that lady's face ; for after one of Sampson's settings-down, poor Mrs. Elton was rather vacant in expression ; and then finding that one of the miller's eyes was, so to speak, fixing her, she made a bold rush at her business, and delivered herself, as follows—

“ You'll excuse my coming, sir, I hope ; but I didn't know what to do ; and, I thought, I'd take the liberty o' seeing your good-lady, sir, for poor Bill's been took, sir.”

“ Then why don't you go to the doctor ? This ain't a hospital,” snarled Sampson.

“ No, sir ; ain't took that a way, sir,” said Mrs. Graves ; “ he's been took on suspicion, sir.”

“ Suspicion of what ? ” said Sampson.

“ Poaching, sir. But it's all a bit o' spite o' that Sporrige's, sir ; for poor Bill ain't been out o' nights for months.”

“ Well, and what's that to do with me ? ” said Sampson. “ I ain't a magistrate.”

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bond of a husband. So now be off, d'ye hear? and pretty quick, too."

At the first harsh words spoken by Sampson, Mrs. Graves had sprung to her feet, and ceased sobbing; and then, dropping her apron, she pressed back her hair from her handsome young rustic face, and gazed, with flushed cheeks and hot eyes, at the brute before her. Then, when he had ceased, she backed slowly and silently to the door, and was gone.

"So that's one of your nice games, is it?" said Sampson, "spending my money upon such a lot as that. I suppose, if I hadn't have been here, I should have been robbed behind my back wholesale. There was that long-nosed, poker-backed curate at me the other day—that d——d day when I got that cussed corn down upon me—asking me for money to buy coals for the old women. He—he—he!" sniggered Sampson. "I fetched him out the receipt file, and showed him the poor's rates, all paid up, every one of 'em, and good stiff ones too; and I asked him—

He—he—he—ha—ha—ha—Oh, dear—oh, lord, there's that cough again."

Sampson's burst of oratory was over, for he coughed until he grew nearly as black in the face as the coal to which he had been asked to contribute. Mrs. Elton patted his back, and shook him, but he kept on until the cough had exhausted itself; when he sat in silence, wiping his eyes, after which, he lay back in his chair snarling and showing his teeth until bed-time—a blessed time for all but his wife, whom he then told to get out the book and read prayers.

CHAPTER X.

MORE SORROWS OF GRAVES.

MRS. BILL GRAVES held up until she had left the cottage some yards behind, and then she broke down, hurried past Miss Cinques' villa with the tears streaming over her face, and then on towards the cottage where she had left the little one in charge of a neighbour. But Mrs. Graves had not proceeded far before she met Alice Vaughan and Madeline, accompanying Annie Newman home, when the rector's daughter could not pass without knowing the cause of the poor woman's grief.

Now although she generally felt well enough disposed to pour her woes into sympathetic ears, yet in this case she could not speak. The rough words of Sampson had checked her sobs as if by magic, but the words of condolence now

whispered in gentle tones had the contrary effect, so that for a few minutes her grief seemed ungovernable. Fortunately the lane was free from observers, and by degrees the sobs became less violent, when, after a few words, it was decided to accompany the poor woman to her cottage, where they soon learned the cause of her distress.

Then followed a whispered conversation, one whose effect was to brighten Mrs. Graves's countenance; and directly after make her break out crying again, then throw herself upon her knees and begin kissing Madeline's hand, sobbing all the while more than ever; for these unlettered people are so foolishly demonstrative for every act of kindness, and seem to feel it, ay, or a slight, either, as keenly as those of higher station—though this is not generally believed.

But the cloud passed over at last; the sun came out once more and filled the whole cottage, which, in spite of its humble aspect, looked bright and comfortable; and there were at that time young

men in Waveley, and London, who would sooner have been in Mrs. Graves's red-brick floored kitchen than in any drawing-room in the land.

Mrs. Graves's mind being now at rest, there was the baby to be shown up for admiration and praise. It had only just woke up, having been "good as gold" in its mother's absence, and now it sat round-eyed and staring in the mother's lap wondering at the visitors and making itself comfortable by the application of that popular hunger-stayer, the fist, pending the administration of the natural nutriment.

"And he is such a weight," said Mrs. Graves ;
"he nearly drags me to pieces."

Madeline, in a tone of praise, which whispered of her being quite accustomed to such matters, said she was not at all surprised ; while Alice made the seedling peasant chuckle and crow by shaking her sunny curls at him and poking him in the fat sides with the end of her sunshade ; all of which appeared to be so excessively ludicrous that the little fellow threw himself back

and laughed furiously. Then Madeline had to feel how heavy he was, and be quite surprised at the juvenile ponderosity; while Alice looked at the tooth that was just through his gums—a tooth which tortured Mrs. Graves so much that she felt sure another was coming. Then Alice must feel the weight, express astonishment, and pass the mass on to Annie Newman, who began tossing it about and talking some of that fluent language considered so particularly adapted to the infant mind.

“A diddle, diddle, diddle, diddle, darling,” said Annie—of course addressing the baby; and at the same time handing it back for Alice to take again.

“Oh! no, thank you,” cried that young lady; “I won’t have it, indeed. I can’t hold it properly. Babies are always so soft and puggy, I’m afraid of squeezing them too hard. I say, Annie, though, I really should so like to have seen your brother in his long gown, looking such a saint when he was going to have his first

christening. If one could only have made the baby cry it would have been——”

No one ever knew what it would have been, for just then the ladies beheld a dark shadow across the sunshine, and Alice stopped speaking, with her lips apart, horror-stricken — as she gazed upon the tall figure of the Reverend Augustus Newman, who frowned austere upon his sister until she put down, or rather handed over the baby to its natural nurse.

The new comer must have heard a portion of Alice's speech, but he only bowed in a very dignified way to the ladies, and after a few words concerning the weather, he proceeded to inform Mrs. Graves that having heard of the chastisement which had fallen upon her house, he had called to see whether he could render any aid.

“Oh, yes! that you can, Gus,” exclaimed Annie, excitedly, and in spite of the cold look of disgust she had brought upon her brother's face, “Oh, yes! Gus, you can let Mrs. Graves have

some money to pay the lawyer to get her poor husband out of prison, for——”

“I meant spiritual aid and advice,” said her brother austerely, and then upon the sly, giving the maiden a severe frown.

Mrs. Graves bobbed most profoundly, and murmured her thanks, while the curate evidently forgetting that he had already brought forward the important topic of the day, again spoke of the weather to the ladies, and said how gratified he felt to find them engaged upon such a work of charity. He spoke with great *empressement* to Madeline, taking no notice of his sister, and but very little of Alice, who did not seem to mind it in the least, now that she had got over the first confusion.

Since the entrance of the curate the party had been standing, and as Mrs. Graves was very solicitous that they should once more be seated, they took their chairs again, not very well knowing what to do—wishing to be away, but feeling very awkwardly situated, for no one liked

to propose a start on account of a latent hope that the new visitor would himself take flight—Madeline, too, feeling especially uncomfortable from the dread that the Reverend Augustus might find that he had some want at the Rectory, and so accompany her home.

For be it known that sundry strange notions had crept into the head of Brother Gus; he had taken to comparing the rector's daughter to a Madonna, and Frank Henderson to a nuisance; he had thought how agreeable it would be to always consult with Madeline concerning the cutting of school-children's hair, needlework prizes, and the general conduct of Sunday schools; but the culminating idea that had crept in and made its way right to the top of all the others, was, that he should like to confess Madeline Glebeley; when all the time Frank Henderson was duly installed in that most important of posts—confessor—sacred to lover or husband when *pater* resigns his claim.

The consequence of this was that Gus showed

not the slightest intention of leaving, but prepared to follow the example already set, by placing his hat upon the table, and drawing forward a rush-bottomed chair.

“Don’t take that one, please sir,” said Mrs. Graves, holding baby with one hand, and dusting another chair with her apron.

“Oh! this one will do, my good woman,” said the curate with dignity, and as the words passed his lips he sat down, but with a crash upon the floor, for he would not listen to the advice tendered.

The Reverend Augustus Newman did not say “Oh!” but he made his mouth into the correct shape, screwed his face awry, and then turned very sick and faint; and no wonder, for the brick floor was very hard, and the shock to his spine severe. However, in a few minutes the sharpest of the pain went off, and shortly after the visit was brought to a conclusion, the sufferer never for a moment losing his calm and impassive manner, not even when he was dusting

off Mrs. Graves' ruddle, which largely adorned his clothes.

Madeline had cause for dread ; for the curate, after leaving Mrs. Graves some tracts, walked with them right through the village, keeping close beside, and directing all his very slowly-measured conversation to the rector's daughter. But the Rectory was reached at last, when the curate bore off his sister, and conveyed her home himself, while the other young ladies, dove-like, took refuge in the cote from this clerical hawk, Alice exclaiming, " Oh, Maddy, did you ever see such a wretch ? "

Mrs. Graves was only too glad to get rid of her visitors ; for she had to see Mr. Deedes, and find out whether he would take up Bill's case, telling him that he would be sure of his fee, for Miss Glebeley and Miss Vaughan had promised that she should have the money.

Now Mr. Deedes fully believed that Bill Graves was more sinned against than sinning, and readily undertook the task ; while the credit

must be given him that he would have been equally ready even if he could not have felt so sure of his pay as upon this occasion ; so that Mrs. Graves might have spared Sampson Elton the pain of refusing her request. And now from the wife, Mr. Deedes learned that although since his return from gaol Bill Graves had been worthy of the term immaculate as regarded poaching, he had still been unable to rid himself of his old friends and associates, the consequence being that some one or another was constantly making a call and inviting the weak-enough young man to an evening's amusement—one that might extend into the night, but would not be without its recompense. But Bill shook his head at them, and many a time his friends left him in dudgeon, giving him their opinion pretty freely concerning his "white-livered" conduct, as they called it. However, partly from resolution and partly from the pleading of his wife, he resisted them all, and kept to his work when he had it, and when he had none,

waited hopefully in the expectation that more would come.

A night or two before, a couple of his old comrades—men who had shared with him many a score of pheasants—called at the cottage after dusk, and tried hard to persuade Bill to join them in a foray to be made on the following night. But no; Bill was staunch, and held out against the temptation.

Then he *must* walk up to the Lion, and have a pint for old friends' sake.

Yes, he would do that, although his wife shook her head at him; and soon after he was in the public-house kitchen, where he was again assailed with every importunity; but Bill remained staunch, even after he had taken his share of the fourth pint.

At last the tempted one was making up his mind to go; but no, he must help over another pint first. So the other pint was ordered in, and made its appearance in company with Mr. Thomas Sporrige and an attendant satellite, a

famous hand at poacher-catching, if he was well directed, for he had a hard head and plenty of strength, but no brains; while probably a machine constructed upon the same principle would have answered all purposes except that it might have been broken and come expensive to repair, whereas David Dock always healed of himself.

The greeting between the parties was more marked than cordial, and ended in the keeper soon after taking his departure, fully convinced that there was a plot hatching. But Bill Graves proved firm in all his good intentions, and he soon after started away home, slightly unsteady in his walk; listened to a short lecture from his wife concerning the bird which had its neck wrung through being in bad company, and then retired to rest.

The very next night there was a raid upon the pheasants down at the admiral's, when Bill's two friends, in company with a couple more, made a very fair bag of game, especially when it is taken into consideration that the bag was

a sack ; but at last, while they were loading and firing away at a couple of fine cocks upon a fir branch, birds which seemed to bear a charmed life, up came the keepers, and a terrible fight ensued, when blows were given and taken savagely, till the affray resulted in a watcher having his arm broken, and a keeper being shot through the shoulder, and nearly bleeding to death.

Bill Graves' friends were old birds at poaching, but they had been caught with chaff at last ; for the two pheasants which had kept them in play were only stuffed—a pair of what the keepers called “ duffers,” placed as a trap for intruders, just at the spot where poachers might be first expected, though in this case it proved to be the last visited by Bill's friends, and resulted as above.

The next morning there was a regular hue and cry, for warrants were soon out. The news was all over Waveley before breakfast, but slightly exaggerated ; for, according to the report, one keeper was killed—namely, Mr. Thomas Sporrige—while two were bleeding to death. But

Mr. Sporrige was neither killed nor bleeding to death: he was only rubbed down a bit, and wore the aspect of having carried off the belt in the last fight for the championship.

As for Mrs. Graves, she had hugged her husband three times that morning, and told him how thankful he ought to be that he had had nothing to do with the expedition. Bill grinned too, and seemed to quite agree with the words of wisdom uttered by his wife. But the worthy couple's state of exultation was but of short duration; for soon after the last hug a neighbour dropped in, and professed the greatest astonishment at finding Bill at home, having expected to find that he was in hiding.

"Well, but I warn't theer," said Bill. "What ha' I got to hide for?"

"Oh, but they say as you was one of 'em," cried the neighbour; and it was of no use for the accused to deny the hard impeachment; so at last Bill turned rusty, and the visitor went off shrugging her shoulders.

This episode, Mrs. Graves said, made her heart leap into her mouth, and caused no small consternation at the cottage, which consternation became worse about noon, when a couple of policemen—one of whom was the man stationed in the village—Job Gauntlet—arrived, bearing a warrant, and closely followed by Mr. Thomas SporrIDGE himself, in the flesh.

“That’s him,” said SporrIDGE, as the party entered the cottage; and the men proceeded to take poor Bill.

“Why, what’s this here for?” said Bill, half-disposed to show fight.

“All right, my man,” said Job; “lars night’s work.”

“But I warn’t outer the house arter seven o’clock,” cried Bill, stoutly.

“Oh, no; of course he warn’t,” said SporrIDGE; “and he never hit me on the head with the chunk end of a gun—oh, no! of course not. He’s as innercent as a lamb, bless yer. He warn’t making his plans at the Lion along wi’

Rabbitty Dick and Bob Saunders—oh, no! of course not. Bring him along.”

Bill Graves looked at his wife, and his wife looked at him; and then the blood so flushed up in the man’s face that more than one hand went in search of a staff.

“Now then, none o’ that,” said Job. “Are you a comin’ quiet, or is it to be the bracelets?”

“Oh! go quiet, Bill,” whispered Mrs. Graves. “They can’t hurt you; you wasn’t out o’ the place at all last night, as I can prove. Ah! that I can, Mr. SporrIDGE; I can prove it,” she continued aloud and very defiantly.

“Ah! to be sure,” said SporrIDGE, “that will do the business nicely;” and then he tried to wink, but the matter turned out a failure on account of the extreme tightness of that side—his face being swelled. “Come on, my lad,” he said, “and we’ll have some more of your pals to keep you company afore night.”

Poor Bill! he groaned and looked at his wife again. It did seem hard, after trying his best

for so long, and bearing taunt and sneer at his cowardice, it was hard after all this to be dragged off in open daylight through the village. It would not be the first time, certainly; but then hadn't he sworn that he would reform, and promised the parson, too; and now what would they say of him all through the place? What would they think of all his vows and determinations? It was no wonder that as Bill looked upon his wife's face he groaned, for in imagination he pictured himself walking down the village street, with heads from every cottage craning after him.

"Now then," said Gauntlet, "come on; we've plenty more to do to-day;" and then he strode across the room to where Bill had backed, and collared him rather roughly.

Bill Graves was in a brown study just then, and when the constable's hand was laid upon him, he started so violently that the man fell back, tripped over a stool, and tumbled heavily upon the brick floor. This looked so like an endeavour to escape, and resistance of the law, that the others

made a rush at him directly, when Bill, in spite of his wife's scream, remembered the free air of heaven, and the close confinement of a cell ; thought of his last undeserved imprisonment, and of the wrong now put upon him, and rousing up, he struck out right and left at his assailants—floored one, closed with the other, and then freeing himself, darted through the door which led upstairs, banged it after him and slipped the bolt.

The trio looked at each other for an instant, and then made a rush at the door, before which Mrs. Graves had now taken her post to keep them away. But they had her on one side in an instant, and swung the poor woman into a chair, where she sat quivering while they tried to force open the frail door, which cracked loudly at the first shock.

“Run outside, you,” cried Job Gauntlet to his brother of the staff; “perhaps he’ll be gettin’ outer window.”

This was a bright thought, as the sequel proved ; for in a moment after the man had left the house, there came a shout which brought out

Job and Sporrige just in time to see Bill take the garden hedge in a flying leap, and dash across a newly-ploughed field.

"Come on," shouted the policeman, trying to imitate Bill, where the hedge was lower, and divided Bill's garden from the next.

"Come on," roared Sporrige, about to follow, when there was a bit of a crash, and a howl, and then a roaring buzz, for policeman number two had jumped right on to the earthen pan cover of Widow Scrimshaw's beehive, and then gone down headlong to the ground with the straw emblem of industry sticking between his legs.

"Look out!" cried Sporrige, darting back to the gate.

"Murder!" shrieked the unfortunate constable, scrambling up and tumbling over the hedge into the ditch beside the road, closely followed by the bees, for it was mid-day, and the weather warm for the season.

"Run for it!" shouted Sporrige, setting the example, but in the direction taken by poor Bill

Graves, and then closely followed by Job Gauntlet and the discomfited policeman they gave chase to the retreating figure, for the bees soon gave up their attack.

"I'm a'most stung to dead," growled Job's companion, rubbing himself savagely.

"Never mind that," roared Sporridge, "you musn't let him get off."

And now the chase grew hot, and away they went, the quarry making for the wood to the left of the Hall Farm. But it was hard running, for the rich soil clung to their boots, while the pace soon became of really a killing nature. As for Sporridge, he would have run until he dropped to take a poacher; and, besides, he fancied that he had some debts to pay off in this instance; while the policemen felt that they dared not let the pursued one escape after having once had him as prisoner in their hands; and acting upon this thought they drew forth their staves and looked with rather evil eyes upon the flying man.


Off and away. "Crash" through the hedge at the bottom of the field, and now over the pasture went Bill Graves, with his nostrils dilating and eyes brightening, as he dashed over the wet grass. "Crash, crash, crash," and all the pursuers through, and in hard chase, every man breathing hard, but determined in aspect. Bill kept casting an eye behind, and found that he was widening the space between himself and his pursuers, and then on he dashed, muttering the one word "liberty," as he toiled over the wet grass—anywhere to put distance between them; but all the while knowing full well that if he escaped this time, there was no more home for him, since in future Waveley would be as the lion's jaws.

Another field crossed, and another hedge, and pursued and pursuers again well over, though the pace grew somewhat slower; and now the poor fellow gave a despairing groan—a groan, as it were, of agony, for the darkness of the prison cell seemed closing him in, while perhaps trans-

portation awaited him; and this sobbing groan came from his breast, when, on looking round, he saw his pursuers were strengthened by the arrival of the old Squire and Stephen Vaughan, both mounted; while, worse than all, tearing over the field in full chase was Cæsar, the great mastiff-mouthed brute of a yard dog.

Bill's breath came in laboured sobs, and for a moment despair had it all its own way; but directly after, a grim smile stole over his face, and he pulled out his knife, opened it with his teeth, and then struggled on still muttering "liberty"—though he could hear the shouts behind him, and the dog cheered on by Sporrige.

"Crash" at another hedge went Bill Graves, and then stuck fast for a few moments; but before he could wrest himself clear there was a deep-mouthed bay, and leaping right at him, came the great dog, forcing him through, and down upon his hands and knees in the ditch, his knife flying out of his grasp in amongst the



undergrowth. In an instant he turned to grapple with his four-footed adversary, but there was no need, for the great beast gave a sort of whining fawn, and a roll over him as an old friend, and then evidently taking Bill for the foremost man in the chase, ran on in search of the quarry.

Directly after, as he turned his head, Bill saw the Squire and Stephen pull up at the hedge—nominally, because their horses would not take it; but really because they had just made out who was the fugitive, who had, till within the last day or two, been at work for them; or it would have been a stiff bullfinch that would have kept back Stephen; while, no doubt, some way or another, the old gentleman would have found his way through had he wanted very particularly.

However, it so happened that he did not want in this case, for though possessed with a most wholesome abhorrence of poachers, he liked to tackle those who poached upon his own lands.

But on still panted Sporr ridge and the two

policemen, and on went poor Bill Graves, leaving his pursuers farther and farther behind, puffing and struggling over the heavy land, for they were now in another ploughed piece. About the middle the stung policeman pulled up, regularly done for; but the others pushed on, hopeful yet of overtaking the fugitive who was nearly half the length of the field ahead.

Just at this time, Bill made a bound to leap into the other field over a newly "plashed" hedge, not above two feet high, when slipping upon the wet ground, he fell short of his aim, and staked one of his legs sadly—the rough white-thorn stem tearing the flesh from the limb, and making a ghastly wound; while sick, faint, and gasping, the poor fellow rolled over into the ditch on the other side. As soon as Bill was down, Cæsar pulled up and stood, with lolled-out tongue, panting over him, until the poor fellow tried to continue his flight; but, directly after, Sporridge and the policeman were upon him, the former literally, for he threw

himself down upon the poor fellow, and seemed disposed to lie there and rest.

“Get out, you lazy brute,” growled Job, “why didn’t you pull him down?” and to facilitate the answer he fetched the dog a rap over the head with his staff. But Cæsar was too imperial to suffer such an indignity, and before Job knew where he was, the dog had him by the calf, gave him an angry shake, and then beat a retreat for a few yards, and stood showing his teeth and twisting his tail, as if ready at any time for another attack.

Turning from the dog, Job Gauntlet now brought out the handcuffs, and after a short tussle, wherein poor wounded Bill had not a chance, he was securely fettered; and now, made safe, the policeman got rid of a little of his spleen by hitting his prisoner savagely with his staff—of course, in self-defence.

“Come, now; none o’ that,” cried Sporridge.
“Don’t hit a man when he’s down.”

Job grumbled, rubbed his leg, helped the pri-

soner up, and then formed one in a triumphant but very muddy procession ; but one which lasted no longer than to the gate of the field, where poor Bill fainted away, and had to be left in charge of one constable, while the other fetched a cart, in which the prisoner was conveyed, first to the doctor's, and afterwards to Edgeton police station.

People, no doubt, watched poor Bill Graves' progress, but he was spared any unpleasantry on that score by his recumbent position in the cart. So that in conveying the essence of this to Mr. Deedes, that is, as far as she knew, Mrs. Graves might well say that her husband had been took. Mr. Deedes, however, learned all he wanted ; sifted it from the extraneous matter, and then dismissed the poor woman to her lonely cottage.

CHAPTER XI.

NOËL.

It has been said that there is honour among thieves, and of course poachers belong to the pilfering race. The rest of the gang engaged with Rabbitty Dick and Bob Saunders were captured and committed for trial; but thanks to Mr. Deedes, who ably defended him; the poachers who, one and all, swore he was not there; the keepers, who could not prove his identity; and the fact that, with the exception of his injured leg, he had not a mark upon him, while every one else displayed scars of every shape and hue, Bill Graves got off with a severe reprimand for keeping bad company—the bench hoping that this would be a warning to him.

Warning or not, Bill Graves possessed a memento of the event in a bad leg which kept

him for two months unemployed, with the wolf snarling at his door all day and all night long. So that at last the ex-poacher began to despair of things being any better, and when an old companion brought him a head of game in the night he had not the heart to refuse it, nor Mrs. Graves to stay him, in the then empty state of their cupboard. Bill began to think at last that he could not have been cut out for an honest man. He generally had good luck over his poaching excursions, of course excepting the rather unpleasant month or two's hard labour that sometimes followed: while, whenever he tried to be honest, it was always the same—matters went wrong with him.

Frank Henderson had had a suspicion glance through his mind, to the effect that it was Mr. Bill Graves that he had encountered of a night hanging about the cottage, and with whom he had had a tussle upon one occasion, and this suspicion had been greatly strengthened by the anxiety expressed by Sampson concerning his

examination, and the disgust he showed when he heard that Bill was discharged. Upon one or two occasions, Frank sounded the man; but without any avail, and if he had any hold upon Sampson it was very evident that it did not prove of much profit, and somehow or another, though he looked out anxiously for the next coming of the nocturnal visitor, by some mischance he was never able to get sufficiently near to the figure to see the features; but from Bill Graves' nocturnal habits and the threats Sampson had more than once uttered against the poacher, in connection with the loss of a favourite dog, Frank felt more and more convinced that there was something behind the scenes that he should like to master, though he soon knew that it must be by some other channel than through either of the parties concerned.

Bill Graves did not complain much, for people were very kind to him; and while his leg was bad he did not want for visitors—of such a class too, as often sent the wolf growling away frightened

from the door-step whenever they made their appearance ; while after such visitors it was generally some little time before the brute came again. Madeline was frequently there, and generally attended by the two maidens who before bore her company. Then Stephen Vaughan and Frank Henderson, best of friends now, would drop in for a chat, curiously enough, too, on the days when the ladies called ; and more curiously still, they would get there just before the maidens arrived. But as a matter of course mistakes would happen, and upon one occasion when these gentlemen had, as they thought, calculated their time aright, and were chatting to the patient, Stephen busily engaged in sending the child to Banbury Cross, the latch was raised, and the Reverend Augustus made his appearance.

Poor hope of the house of Graves ! Stephen Vaughan left go of the horseman's hands, and tumbled him suddenly over, so that his unfortunate young bald head came sharply in contact with the bricks, resulting in a howl which

necessitated his being carried into the wash-house and calmed with the spoon out of the treacle jar fetched for his especial delectation.

Stephen Vaughan turned very red in the face, for he had not arrived at an age which sets at nought the opinions of others; Frank mentally wished the curate at Hanover, or in his pulpit, or anywhere but in the Graves' cottage; while the curate himself was apparently rather disgusted to find gentlemen where he had evidently expected the softer sex; but apparently after all he approved of what he saw, and sat down beaming, and full of plans for their future welfare.

But why did the Reverend Augustus Newman determine upon bringing another sister to Waveley? for the purpose of keeping Annie company, or what? It is hard to say, but he decidedly did think of doing so every time he glanced at Frank; while to Stephen he was most gracious. There was no conversation, though, to be carried on, when such unmixable elements

were together ; and the consequence was, a rather uncomfortable silence would keep falling on the assembly, till Stephen, who was opposite the window, caught sight of something which made him pull out his watch very suddenly, and remember that he had a very particular call to make. This broke the spell, and in a few moments the curate had the place to himself and the injured man ; while the information imparted to three young ladies coming down the lane was sufficient to cause them to direct their steps elsewhere.

Matters were now progressing in a terribly uninteresting manner. Madeline and Frank enjoyed themselves as young folks in their condition generally do—that is to say, in the most selfish way imaginable. In spite of Mrs. Vaughan's sighs, matters would not shape themselves as she wished ; and it was considered that Stephen Vaughan was paying his addresses to the curate's sister, but in a very hot-and-cold

fashion. The curate himself was like Stephen, who, again, was like Tom Phipps—uncomfortable, and given to sighing. Frank was to be married shortly; so 'twas said; and hints were thrown out respecting the house he would occupy; but Alice—now about the most careless and indifferent of the actors on this little stage—Alice said it was all nonsense, and she did not believe the wedding would come off for some time; and Alice must have had some authority for being so positive.

So much interest had been taken in mating matters that Squire Vaughan had been almost alone in noticing how the time had passed away; and over his pipe and flagon he recalled how the golden harvest time glided swiftly by, when his waving corn-fields had been invaded by troops of labourers, and the shining sickle had laid the rustling ears in long rows of sheaves. Loudly had the wain groaned beneath the life-sustaining burden; but the prime interest of the season had been the harvest-party, held after the

men had had their bounteous supper, and enjoyed themselves as harvest men do—ate and drank till they could eat and drink no more. And now, almost before it could be believed, the chill rains had led in winter, with its bitter storms. The great pond was frozen hard, and bush and spray glittered with the frozen breath of the harsh monarch. The pointed gables of the old Hall were softened in their outline by the heavy fall of snow which clung to them, and bent down the broad and spreading cedars till the branches touched the ground. Wheels of passing vehicles rolled silently by upon the thick white carpet; while—morning, noon, and night—the keen air told of many degrees of frost.

It was true Christmas weather, and Squire Vaughan walked about, chuckling, rubbing his hands, and thinking of the coming festivity. He praised old English customs, and loved to keep them up too. He used to say that he could afford a little joviality, and he meant to have it; and

so long as there was a log to blaze up the chimney, a turkey fit to kill, a joint to be had at the butcher's, a string of sausages upon the kitchen line, a glass of wine and a drop of home-brewed in the cellar, and a friend or two to respond to his invitations—he would keep up Christmas Day after the old fashion, in spite of new-fangled ideas on everything, even down to farming—turning crew-yards into druggists' shops, and feeding beasts upon pills and potions instead of upon good honest oil-cake and hay-chaff. So the Squire sent out his invites year by year, and a merry party assembled beneath the hospitable roof. Every relative within reach came, as a matter of course—rich and poor alike. The Rector came with his daughter; Frank and Mrs. Elton, and even Sampson—for the old gentleman used to say, “I like poor Mrs. Elton; while Frank seems to have grown almost into one's own boy; and as to Elton,—a black-looking brute—one must ask him, I suppose. I'm not given to wishing ill to my neighbours,

but I do wish to goodness he would choke himself with a turkey drumstick, or nearly get drowned in his own dam. He is no good to any one, and I'm sure he leads that poor weak woman a terrible life." Then invites were sent to the Reverend Augustus and his sister, but were accepted only in the latter instance; while, as a matter of course, Tom Phipps came.

The old oak dining-room used to be turned into a regular holly copse, glistening with red berries; and upon this occasion, after the decoration of the church by the same hands, had been ornamented by the maidens whose names so often occur here. As to the great mistletoe branch that hung from the centre, it was one mass of pearly berries—every berry the representative of a Christmas kiss; and it alone was hung up in triumph by the Squire himself, all the while aided, abetted, and protected by a body-guard, consisting of Frank, Stephen, and Tom Phipps. For it was dangerous work, the hanging up of that branch of mistletoe, in the

face of such an artillery as was brought to bear upon the old gentleman ; and besides, he was rather stout and rather helpless, for the branch was very big—so big, in fact, that it nearly brought Tom Phipps down headlong out of the big elm, where he had laddered his way up, after stopping to blow his fingers every few feet, and then dropped the bill-hook twice before he cut the bough from its hold.

And there stood the Squire, with boots all snowy, and nose and face glowing and red, up on the top of the short steps, trying to reach the hook in the great oak beam ; while Alice, Annie Newman, and Madeline, supported by a light brigade of young cousins, who had dispersed the body-guard, were tugging at the old gentleman's skirts, and trying to shake him from his perch. Now he swayed one way, now another, now he nearly got the loop over the hook, now he was nearly down from over-reaching. But no, he recovered himself, and with one grand effort reached the hook, puffed loudly, and then began slowly to

descend; when, posting his beaten-off guard at the door, he showed how nimble he could be by catching the damsels one by one, and, as he said, trying the bough. But Alice declared it was not fair, for he saluted some of the maidens twice over.

Christmas morning—just as it should be, with earth in her brightest winter robes, and every bough and spray adorned with nature's fairest gems. Bright shone the sun, and blue was the sky, while there was a cutting, freezing breeze scudding over the earth, that sent the blood coursing and tingling through the veins, and made the cheek to glow beneath the brightened eye. There was a regular beaten track through the deep snow up to the Hall, while early in the morning, before it was so deeply marked, Frank Henderson added his footsteps so as to be ready for breakfast, and the walk afterwards to church. The Hall could make a display of bedrooms when there was occasion, and from the number of staying visitors there must have been a mighty

sheet-airing going on for a week before. Alice had carried the day, so that Madeline and Annie Newman were both guests for the time, besides the brigade of cousins ; and it was a sight worth seeing that morning when they all assembled to accompany the Squire to church ; for Mrs. Vaughan *could* NOT leave home upon a Christmas Day—a day when the old gentleman was most exacting as to the dinner being done to a turn, while the servants seemed worse than ever. The Squire had not many ideas in his head, but those which he had were good ones. His favourite notion was to imitate the old English gentleman, and he did it to the best of his ability ; proving himself no mean representative of that lord of the fine old fellows in blue coats and badges. It was certainly a source of discontent that he could not keep up such a staff as his great predecessor ; but old Vaughan was a prudent man, and considered over-running the constable a misdoing worthy, or unworthy, of ranking amongst the seven cardinal sins.

But here have we been keeping the old gentleman and the bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked bevy of maidens waiting in the cold, with their attendant satellites ready to bow down and worship to the end of their lives. And no wonder; for such faces surely ne'er were seen—their owners muffed, furred, and made ten times more killing by having their charms masked with those torturing little veils. As for blond Alice, it was sinful to allow her near the church; such a bright-eyed, sunny-curled fairy as she looked—a fairy modernised, and wearing a dreadfully killing little cocky turban hat, ornamented with a white wing; her *svelte* form shown off in a tight jacket, and her hands hidden in a grebe muff. Fast Tom Phipps dared not go near her, but paired off with a very girlish cousin. Annie Newman completely spoiled her brother's delivery when she entered the church that morning, so far opposite was she in her costume to that affected by a sister of mercy. And Madeline—but there really is not time to write a long

description of the ladies' dress, for they are all marshalling themselves into order or disorder, and, followed or accompanied by the gentlemen who are made book-bearers, are passing down the avenue towards the church.

But one thing must be chronicled here; and that is, that in spite of the lapse of time, and the application of its anodyne, Stephen Vaughan's wound must still have been painful from the glances—envious glances he kept casting towards the part of the procession occupied by the Rector's daughter, generally, however, resting his eyes by turning them towards the curate's sister, and directly after giving a startled look to see if Alice was watching.

The Hall pew filled, ran over into a smaller pew on either side, and then trickled down the chancel in a stream which terminated in Tom Phipps and the girlish cousin. And very cold it was in the little old church, but then hearts were warm enough, and no one seemed to be suffering much when the Rector finished his

sermon, and Madeline played the good folk out. The Hall party filed off last along the snowy path, greatly strengthened, for the Rector joined now, with Mr. and Mrs. Deedes, and Mr. Childe; and lastly, trying to look very agreeable, but making a dismal failure of it, Sampson Elton, Esq.—as he was called in the directory—escorting his dame. But, however he might afterwards have relented, there was no Reverend Augustus Newman, for he dined in cold state before a very small fire in his own room, with Miss Cinques' cat for company, and grieved during the remainder of the day for the worldliness of his sister and his superior in the church.

“Safe? Yes,” cried the Squire; “that chimney will stand anything. Clap on another log!” And another log was clapped on, and the fire roared, and sparkled, and flamed up the chimney, till the windows, the plate and glass upon the table, the wine upon the sideboard, and the eyes of those assembled glowed again.

Bustle and hurry, and hurry and bustle, and then in came the dinner.

"No fashion to-day," said the old gentleman, "but English fare!" And fare it was. Sirloin, turkey, cheek and chine, capon and goose; humming home-brewed ale, and a rare glass of port and sherry—wine which sparkled in the decanters like living gems as the table quivered beneath the weight of the goodly cheer.

"A merry Christmas to all!" was the Squire's grace.

"In the name of the Giver of all, amen," said the Rector.

Then followed feasting; and, in good time, the holly-crowned pudding in a blazing sea of brandy, which flickered and danced in waves of light, while at the Squire's end rose a goodly stack of mince-pies.

Evening closing in and the red curtains drawn, lamp and candle, blazing fire, and the dessert shining again in the depths of the dark mahogany.

Night, and reports circulated of the keen, fierce frost outside; the wind roaring in the chimney; song and tale; forfeits, dancing and blind-man's-buff, with the Squire blindfold. Then the mistletoe brought into requisition; and the berries totally forgotten until a maiden voice exclaimed against the salutes, declaring that the stock of glistening pearls should have been exhausted an hour before.

The Yule log which had been drying for months was blazing and crackling away, for the fire had eaten deeply into one side, and that side sent a golden glow through the room; then the piano was dragged into the centre, and a half circle formed round the fire; the old fogies routed out of their corner where they had been enjoying their whist; and then a table was placed in front of the Squire, upon which there soon appeared three portly china bowls—punch in the centre, negus on one flank, and on the other some tremendous ancient beverage with red-hot roasted apples plunged cissing and sput-

tering therein, to bob about and send forth a most enticing odour—a regular forest of tall-stemmed glasses clustered round; and then to work went the old gentleman with his ladle, Tom Phipps playing Ganymede, till all the party were supplied.

“Now then!” cried Stephen, after the toast of “A merry Christmas to all” had been duly honoured, “silence for a song.”

And silence ensued, for all knew the custom of the place, and, as he had for many years past, Squire Vaughan trolled out his only song, “Winter’s Coming,” though to all present he seemed already there—

“Where the gloomy firs and larches
Interlace in darkling arches,
There’s a humming;
For with saddened moan and sighing,
Now the leaves around are dying,
The winds rush onward crying—
‘Winter’s coming!’

“The flowers in death are sleeping,
And the trees above are weeping
Tears of sorrow;

For the clouds in gathering levy
Tell of rain and dark mists heavy
On the morrow.

“How the bare trees groan and shiver
As the rude blasts make them quiver!
Cold and numbing
Speed the sleety arrows darting,
Crying ‘Autumn days are parting,
Winter’s coming!’

“Swollen streamlets as they’re surging
Sing a requiem—like dirging—
Eddying madly,
Ere in icy bonds the giant
Stills their angry waves defiant;
And the reeds, no longer pliant,
Murmur sadly.

“Heap up the blazing pine knots!
Bring forth the flask and wine pots!
Bright ale humming!
Every creature comfort—aid—
To repel the chill invader!
Winter’s coming!”

Plenty of applause followed the Squires’ song;
much of which was, however, drowned by Alice
thumping away at the first bars of another air.

“Now, Stevey, bashful brother, get yours done,
and then I can go and sit down,” she exclaimed.

But “Stevy, bashful brother,” seemed in no

hurry to get his done, and he would have backed out of it altogether if he had had the opportunity; but no such chance was afforded him, for Alice kept on thump, thump, at the opening note till, in sheer despair he roared—

“ I had a dream upon a Christmas night,

A dream, a dream—a golden-featured dream ;
As I sat by the fire, when the logs burned bright, -
And ruddy were the walls with their gleam.

The holly green shone, and the mistletoe hung
From the blackened oaken beams that in carven rafter sprung ;
And each casement glittered light upon that merry Christmas
night,
And flashed forth many rays upon the earth's robe white.”

“ Chorus ! ” cried Tom Phipps, but without effect.

“ I saw in my dream, in the fire's golden glow,

Where the ruby-tinted flames shot afar,
A figure with an urn, whence with sparkling, beady flow,
He poured an amber river 'neath his car.

He was girded with a zone of the tendril-handed hop ;
His crown was golden russet, from the bearded barley's crop ;
Round his car were sturdy peasants, such as bring the harvest
home,
Gaily quaffing sparkling goblets from the river's pearly foam.

“ He cried then, ‘ Drink with me—amber ale ;

‘ And shun the baleful spirits of the still ;

‘I give you ruddy health for cheeks that pale,

‘With a bright unclouded brain and iron will.

‘I scorn the sickly produce of the southern vineyard hills :

‘For Ij give you honest vigour, where their draught your
blood but chills ;

‘So quaff the amber river of the King of British Beer,

‘And pledge me merry Christmas, for I give you hearty cheer.’

“So I drank to the king, on that Christmas night,

In that dream, that dream—that golden-featured dream ;

While the flagon brightly sparkled in the ruddy glowing
light,

Of the ale of that amber stream.

Then the monarch passed me, smiling, on his mission far
and wide ;

For he roams throughout old England in the merry Christmas
tide,

Meeting joyous shouts for honour, in his welcome through
the land,

As he pours the amber river with a smile and bounteous
hand.”

“Bravo—bravo—encore—encore ; a-tchishew
—a-tchishew—er-er-er-er a-tchishew,” cried Tom
Phipps, as he sat nearest the door. “Why, what
a smoke !”

“Eh? what? Smoke? So there is. Just see
what they’re burning, Steve, will you?” said the
Squire, ladling away at the punch to the neglect
of “the amber stream.”

Stephen Vaughan was back in a moment, and beckoned out his father and Frank.

“ Well; what is it ? ” cried the old gentleman hurriedly, and apparently startled by his son’s pale face.

“ Hush ! ” whispered Stephen, closing the door hastily, for his father had left it open ; then speaking in a low husky voice—

“ Hush ! The house is on fire ! ”

CHAPTER XII.

A FIERY ORDEAL.


"HUSH! The house is on fire!" said Stephen Vaughan; and, as he spoke, the fire bore witness to the truth of his words, for there was a low smothered crackling to be heard, and a stifling smoke crept slowly down the broad staircase into the hall.

"Good God! where?" ejaculated the Squire, in a pitiful voice.

"Up stairs," cried Stephen; "the chimney must have been overheated, and Alice's bedroom is in a blaze."

The old gentleman gave a groan, and covered his face with his hands.

"My poor old home," he muttered; but the next instant he was himself again.



"Let's see what progress it has made," whispered Frank. "Don't let them know in the room, yet. There's no danger there, at present. Come on." And he dashed up the staircase and into the thick of the smoke.

The Squire and Stephen hurried up after him, and in a few moments they stood where the dense smoke was pouring out beneath one of the passage doors—a door which led to the rooms occupied by Alice, Madeline, and two of the cousins.

Frank opened the passage door, and the rush of heated smoke beat him back; but he dashed forward again, and closed the portal, but not so quickly but that he could see a dull glow shining beneath the right-hand door, while the crackling grew louder and louder.

Just then the Squire rushed forward, and would have again thrown the door open; but Frank and Stephen held him back. "That would make matters worse, sir," exclaimed the former. "Be calm, and no doubt we can make all right yet."

"For God's sake go on, then," groaned the Squire. "The poor old house! It will be down at last."

"Not this time," cried Frank. "Now come with me. You, Steve, round to the back, and get all the help you can, and a ladder and buckets. If I'm not there, have the ladder raised, and then form a line of men to the pond; and don't break in the window."

Stephen rushed off, while Frank and the Squire hurried down into the dining-room, where all was now alarm, for the smoke had filled the place, and the party had risen from their seats.

In a few brief sentences, Frank stated what was the matter, and begged of the ladies not to be alarmed, but to keep at one end of the house until there was sufficient danger to warrant their leaving; when, as a matter of course, this had the desired effect, for directly he had ceased speaking, some began to scream, some to faint, one or two to try and get out of the window, and altogether there was such a scene as quite dis-

gusted Frank, who then set about enlisting all the able-bodied men.

“ Glasses round, first,” cried Tom Phipps, helping himself to a ladle of punch ; and then, apparently emboldened by the spirit, he got round to the side of Alice, squeezed her hand, and whispered, “ Don’t be frightened, dear ! ” and then, not knowing what effect such words might have, he hurriedly followed Frank out to the back of the house, where they could see the red glow from the window making a long track of light out upon the darkness. Directly after, several men came up, and a couple of ladders were raised, one on either side of the window ; while buckets were brought, and a line of men formed down to the ice-covered pond, where Stephen was already hard at work breaking a hole.

There was no lack of help, for the labourers came running up, and the Squire, now somewhat recovered from the shock, was soon busily forming a second row of men to pass back the empty buckets to the dipping-man at the pond edge.

"Now, then," cried Frank, "pass up quickly," as twisting one of his legs through the spokes of the ladder, he leaned forward and dashed the empty bucket he held in his hand again and again through the window.

Out gushed the flame, sending him back half blinded and scorched with the fervent heat; but the half-suppressed shriek from below nerved him again, and, knowing full well that the fate of the Hall was sealed if he shrank from his task, he seized the first full bucket that was brought up, and dashed in the contents, passed the empty vessel over to the other ladder by stooping beneath the flames, and then, seizing another and another from beneath as they were handed up, he kept on dashing in the water with untiring arm; but apparently with little effect, beyond making the place vomit clouds of steam, which came hissing forth mingled with the smoke and flame.

It soon became evident that the fire had got a very serious hold, and in more than one breast

there was a feeling of 'despair arising—fear that the fine old hospitable building must come down ; but all this was well concealed, and every man worked as though his life depended upon his exertions.

“ Never mind the furniture ! ” shouted the Squire. “ Every man stick to the buckets. Bravo ! Frank, my lad—in with them. That was a good one, boy. Far in as you can. Keep 'em to the water, Steve. No stopping. Well done. We'll win. Phipps ! Tom Phipps ! Where's Tom Phipps ? ”

“ Here we are ! ” shouted Tom, who was drenched to the skin with water.

“ Let's have some beer here, Tom, ” cried the Squire.

Tom ran off, and soon after reappeared with a large canful of the refreshing beverage, which he proceeded to administer to all around.

It was gratifying to the lookers-on to see that at last the bedroom began to wear a blacker hue ; but there was still a great body of flame in the

place, which, in spite of all his efforts, Frank could not reach, except by making the water splash or rebound from the wall. But now there was a new danger presenting itself, for the fire had eaten its way through into the attic above, where a dull flickering light could be seen, while smoke began to pour out of the window.

"We can do no more good here," cried Frank; "we must tackle it from inside."

"But you'll never bear the smoke," groaned the Squire, in despair.

"We *must* bear the smoke," cried Frank, "or else down comes the place."

"Help! help!" shrieked a voice just at that moment; and one of the girls came running from the kitchen door.

"What's the matter?" roared the Squire.

"Oh, sir!" cried the girl, "Miss Alice—Miss Glebeley—upstairs."

"Why, they were here just now," exclaimed the old gentleman.

But they were not there then, for a short time



previously Alice had remembered that, before the games began that evening, several of her friends went upstairs, and left in Madeline's room their watches and breakable ornaments; and, in company with the girl, she ran up with Madeline to try and save them.

By going up the back-stairs they had no great difficulty in approaching the room; but, as they neared the door, the smoke grew so dense that the girl clung to them, and tried to stop their farther progress. But Alice cried to Madeline to come on, and, catching hold of her hand, she ran through the smoke, opened the door, and, as they disappeared from the girl's sight, the flames burst from the door of Alice's room, lower down the passage, so that escape seemed regularly cut off, and the girl ran shrieking downstairs again.

Frank dashed down his bucket and rushed up to the passage, followed by Tom Phipps and Stephen; but the smoke was so stifling, and accompanied by such a rush of flame, that they were beaten back. But they made another at-

tempt, reached the door, ran in, and as Tom banged it to after him, Frank fell on the floor half suffocated, while Stephen staggered across the room and dashed his hands through the window, thus letting in a burst of refreshing air.

But Frank had found the air more life-sustaining down by the floor, and, recovering himself, he began to search about in the darkness for the unfortunate girls, all the while feeling a painful sense of sinking at the heart. In another instant he came in contact with Stephen, who had just thrown the window widely open, but on separating again, Stephen set up a joyful cry, and bore a figure to the open window. Frank then stumbled towards where he heard the cry, and reached the spot where some one else was lying, and he lifted and bore her to the window to find that it was Alice.

The poor girls were quite insensible, and remained so even after the shouts of Stephen had brought help and a ladder to the spot, when even at such a time Frank could not help feeling

maddened to see his betrothed held by Stephen, and gnawed his lips to think he should not have saved her himself.

But there was no time for further thought. Stephen bore fainting Madeline down the ladder, and Frank and Tom quickly followed with Alice, when they were delivered up to the ladies who flocked round, while the young men again began to battle with the flames, which had been gaining ground somewhat during this incident, though under the Squire's direction the men had been working hard again the moment it was seen that Alice and Madeline were safe.

"Now for inside," cried Frank. "Bring that ladder here, and let them fetch the one round from the other side of the house. Pass up the buckets quickly." And then he hurried up the ladder to the back attic window, dashed in a pane, and unfastened it so that he could crawl in and reach the top passage.

The heat and smoke were overpowering, but by throwing open doors and windows, and a trap

in the little passage, the place became more bearable. The draught was of course most dangerous, but the place could not have been borne without; and now, from the eager aid rendered, Frank found himself in a position to attack the fire on this side. Collecting eight men together with buckets, he stood now by the door of the burning attic.

“Crackle, sputter, crackle,” came with dull and deadly sound from behind the frail door, while the stifling vapour almost overpowered them.

“Now, then; stand by me, Steve,” said Frank, huskily; “and when I throw the door open pass the pails quickly.” Then, with one dash, he sent the door off its hinges, so that it fell right over a large hole eaten by the fire through the floor, checking the rising flames for a few minutes, and enabling Frank to dash out the fire that was around.

The current of air bore off the steam and smoke, and, armed with fresh pails of water, the two young men stood on either side of the fallen

door, while one of the labourers drew it on one side, and then, as they gazed down a fiery well-like opening into the room beneath, they dashed down the water pailful after pailful, with tremendous effect, upon the burning mass beneath.


One of the men now rushed across the attic, kicked out the whole of the lattice, and pushed up a trap door in the roof, so that the steam and smoke rushed out in volumes. Up came the water pailful after pailful, and at last they were able to economise its use more, and direct it into corners and parts where it would be of the most avail. The men found that they could get at the fire up the great staircase, and pailful after pailful of water was carried in that way; while the Rector rubbed his hands gleefully for his forethought in slaking out the dining-room fire, whose overheated chimney had caused all the mischief.

And now the blackened room, sending out its clouds of smoke and steam, told that all the danger was past, for wherever a spark was seen, there were two or three pails of water ready to

extinguish it, while even Frank, after a last tour of inspection, consented to say that the place was safe.

It was well, though, that the men stood their ground when the attic door was dashed in: but for this, the draught made would, in a few minutes, have ensured the spread of the flames beyond remedy, for they had obtained a great hold, as shown by the charred timbers; and it was only after once more having the room most thoroughly drenched, and nearly choking himself in the pungent vapour, that the Squire would consent to leave the dreary spot and take some refreshment.

But there were others, too, who needed rest and a time of refreshing. Drenched, pale, haggard, with singed hair and smoke-grimed face, Frank looked completely exhausted; while there were not many in better plight. The bounteous manner, though, in which refreshments were passed round, soon added a little lustre to the scene, and brightened up the most enfeebled



looking. And now, seeing that all danger was past, the neighbours took their departure with such visitors as did not make the Hall their abiding-place.

Amongst the latter was Sampson Elton, without a spot upon his best black coat, while he observed to his wife as they walked down the avenue, " Well, I shouldn't ha' been surprised if the old place had been burnt down ; " and, judging from the tone of his voice, it did not seem as though he would have much cared.

It was now midnight ; but there was still a comfortable fire in the drawing-room, where, after a due amount of changing, the Squire assembled the residue of his guests, Frank having sent home for a change of raiment. A fresh bowl of punch was brewed, and over his glass the old gentleman gave Frank a squeeze of the hand, more expressive than a quarter hour's speech, and then tried to revive the drooping spirits of the party.

But though Mr. Childe had declared his two patients to be uninjured, and only requiring a

night's rest to recover them from their fright and narrow escape, the Squire's efforts were in vain, in spite of the assistance which he had received from Tom Phipps; for the scene of the last hour or two had completely unnerved the lady portion of the assembly; while as for the gentlemen, they were, as Tom said, "completely knocked up."

Then, too, Frank felt vexed, and ungrateful, and not at all obliged to his old schoolfellow for saving Madeline; in fact, he thought it quite a liberty; and Stephen, somehow, could not help feeling as though he would have been more at rest within himself if he had had the fortune to stumble against his sister in the dark and smoke instead of the Rector's daughter; while, as to the ladies, Madeline pondered long and seriously about the affair, and wondered what Frank thought; and Alice—well, she drank the glass of punch Mrs. Vaughan took up, unknown to the doctor, and then went fast asleep, and dreamed that she went out to a party in a wreath of

mistletoe, to the very great disgust of Tom Phipps, who shut her up in a smoky room, for punishment, till Frank let her out.


But there was no more cheerfulness down stairs; and, after a watch had been set, and sundry precautions taken for excluding the night air, the inmates of the old house sought their smoke-scented couches, and soon after the Hall stood dark and silent amidst the snow.

CHAPTER XIII.

GATHERING SHADOWS.

SPRING came with its beauties—beauties developed by summer—ripened by autumn; and the world at Waveley varied but little in its diurnal motions. Frank had sat for his last examination at Cambridge, and returned home *sans* honours; but he continued to visit at the rectory, and the wise ones still talked of the coming wedding. Stephen Vaughan was at times exceedingly civil to the curate; and at other times sighed deeply and was snubbed by his sister, who had taken of late to saying acid things to Tom Phipps, when he came down; and when Tom came down was now rather more often than of old.

Tea had been kept waiting one night for Sampson's return from market. It was one of



those sad, gloomy nights when the fog curls up, and, wreathing amongst the trees, condenses upon the dying leaves, clings to them in heavy drops, and then falls with a heavy "drip drip" upon the ground beneath—ground which, already soaked and soddened by the rain, comes off in patches upon the wayfarer's sole, or giving way, leaves his deeply indented track visible to the next passer-by. "Whoo-oo" every now and then went the breeze, sweeping the dank mist before it, and then dying away amidst the trees moaningly and with saddened mournful sighs, while the mist came down again heavier than ever.

Night closed in half an hour earlier than usual; and the warm red glow from the cottage windows whispered of comfort and the cheerful evening meal. It was the kind of season when the farmers at Edgeton market hurried off in good time, knowing full well that the longer they stopped, the worse would be the weather; and that if once they sat in circle by the roaring wood fire in the market room, it would take almost more deter-


mination than they possessed to drag themselves away again and out into the cold dark night.

It was past Sampson's time for being back from market, and tea had long been waiting—a most unusual occurrence—for Sampson was not the man to be sociable with the frequenters of the market or any one else. Rapid, the cob, was out of sorts, and at home in the stable: his coat was rough, and he had a cough, the consequence being that Sampson had to hire from Host Hopcraft at the Red Lion, and would probably walk from thence to the cottage.

The cold dank fog must have crept in at the chinks of the door, for the toast grew cold twice over, after being warmed on the brass footman before the fire; and was at last dried up to sippets.

An hour past his usual time, and no Sampson; Mrs. Elton in a fidget; and Frank pretending to read, but dreaming of the future.

Mrs. Elton went to the door for the sixth time and listened.



"He must have stopped at the Lion, Mums," said Frank at last.

"Dear me, my dear," said Mrs. Elton with a start, "who told you so? Just what I was thinking."

"Sympathy of thought, Mums," said Frank, "that's all. No one told me, or whispered in spiritual manner in my ear. But come, I say, send to the buttery for fresh commons, and let's have tea. He will not be back now."

Mrs. Elton felt too much in her son's way of thinking to refuse, and the buttery being sent to for the commons—that is to say, Mary being summoned to make fresh toast—Frank and his mother partook of their tea—the latter sitting all the while with her heart in her mouth, so she said, lest Sampson should return, and finding they had not waited tea, turn cross.


But Sampson did not come; and time wore on apace. A capital fire was kept blazing in case of dampness on the miller's person; the slippers were toasting; and the warm old coat hung over the chair-back ready to hand. Then the tea-

things were put away; the kettle kept singing upon the hob; and the spirit-stand ready with glass, sugar, and spoon, upon the little side-table; but Sampson did not come.

Supper time arrived, and the cat began to show the small element of the great feline race which still clung to it in spite of ages of domesticity, by growing restless and wakeful, and wanting to be let out for the night; but she declined to go upon finding how bad the weather was, and returned to wash her paws by the glowing fire. Sampson's pipe stood in the corner by the grate, and its mouth yawned, but no fragrant fumes issued therefrom; the slippers remained unfilled, and the coat still hung over the chair-back in a ghastly, collapsed, weird fashion; but still no Sampson.

"Pop!" went the fire, and a hot cinder flew out.

"There," exclaimed Mrs. Elton, jumping; "pick that up, Frank, and see whether it's a coffin or a purse."



Frank smiled and obeyed, but in raising the cinder with the tongs, he grasped it somewhat too roughly, and the fragile piece was crushed to atoms.

"Oh, Frank!" cried Mrs. Elton, "and now we cannot tell what it was. But there, child, if that wasn't ten o'clock! Ring for Mary to bring in the supper-tray."

The tray was brought in by Mary, who looked very red-eyed and yawny; but who then received permission to lock the back door and go to bed; and then, as the wind still kept moaning round the house, and the subtle influence of the time seemed to pervade the room and make its inmates uncomfortable, the supper was partaken of without relish; when eleven o'clock struck by the little jerky pendule on the chimney-piece; but still no Sampson.

"I hope nothing has happened, my dear," said Mrs. Elton. "These strange horses are so queer to drive. Do you know I think I'd go so far as the Lion, and see if he is there. Don't let him

see you ; but if he does don't speak to him or seem to be watching him ; and it will be satisfactory to know, you know."

" Well, it certainly would be satisfactory to know," said Frank, " but it is not a very satisfactory night to find out. Let's wait till twelve, and then I'll go and reconnoitre. Don't fidget ; he's only having a glass with somebody, and fighting out a hard bargain."

Twelve o'clock ; and all still but the doleful moaning of the wind in the trees, and the faint roaring of the river as it rushed in a white foam over the piles by the waste water. The curtains close drawn ; Mrs. Elton nodding ; the fire glowing ; and the cinders dropping with their peculiar musical tinkle into the ash-pan, while the falling-in of the glowing coals kept making Mrs. Elton start. Frank sat gazing into the ruddy embers, listening to the pattering rain now falling, and thinking of Madeline as he conjured up bright pictures of the future in the fire.

" What's that ? " cried Mrs. Elton, starting

up, pale and affrighted, to gaze in her son's face, for he had also jumped up; but he could not answer the question, and was all in a tremble. The wind had lulled, and all was perfectly still; but they had both been startled from sleep; and Frank now saw that the pipe by the fireside had fallen, and was broken to fragments; while the coat upon the chair-back had glided down with a soft rustle to the ground.

Then, as they stood listening, "Wail, wail," went the wind, and rattled at the window, howled in the chimney, and then the gate swung and creaked upon its hinge, as though someone had passed through. But there were no footsteps on the gravel; there was no foot upon the scraper; only the wild moaning and shrieking of the wind round and round the house, then roaring again in the chimney, down which came hissing and sputtering a few drops of rain.

"Whoo-oo-oo-oo" again moaned the wind more loudly than ever, and the window rattled so sharply that it seemed as though some one was trying to


get in ; and Mrs. Elton gave a wild cry of affright as she clung to her son's arm.

"That must be him, dear," she exclaimed ;
"pray go to the door and see. I'm sure it was."

"Nonsense, mother, sit down : it was only the wind ; but I must confess it sounds queer and uncomfortable. I'd rather hear it when in bed. What a storm there is getting up ! But what's the matter with the cat ? "

Nothing, only that it was restless and sticking its claws in the carpet to drag them out again, and apparently anxious to get out of the house—setting up its fur and looking brush-tailed, wild-eyed, and staring.

Frank walked to the door, went into the passage, and let the cat out, when the wind came with a rush and extinguished the swing-lamp, and then pressed against the door as though the spirits of the air opposed its being closed ; and then, when foiled, they wailed round the house again, and roared more loudly than ever. But Frank donned his pea-jacket and low-



crowned hat, and then, armed with a thick stick, prepared to set off on his tour of inspection.

"Very strange he has not come in," said Frank.

"Very, my dear," said his mother, now growing agitated. "I never knew him to stay like this before. I hope nothing has happened. Don't be long, dear; for I feel so upset and nervous. Take the key with you, dear; for I feel so upset and nervous. Did I say so twice? Well, I can't help it, dear. I shall go and sit with Mary in her room till you come back."


Frank replenished the fire; took the key; turned up the collar of his coat; and then sallied forth into the wild night.

The rising wind had driven off the fog, but the rain now beat down pitilessly, while about the mill the swollen waters rushed and roared, and Frank could not help thinking what a little chance for life any one falling into the stream would now have. Bending down, as the furious blast came right in his face, he hurried on, and

before he had gone many yards he saw at the distance of about twenty paces, but very dimly, the same figure that had so long haunted the cottage; but which he had not seen now for many months past.

Frank hurried on to overtake it; but just then there came a tremendous blast, which, with its accompanying rain, caused him to turn his back for a minute, and hold on his hat; and then when he resumed his walk the figure had disappeared. Frank now stood by the cross-roads, where there were lanes to the village, the Hall, and Cobbleton, and the stranger, or, as he suspected, Bill Graves, might have taken either. But it was not a night for pursuing him, so Frank turned towards the village, and directly after encountered some one coming towards him.

He now felt satisfied as to who was the visitor, for the poacher hurried by him, evidently not wanting to be recognised, while Frank hurried on towards the Red Lion, wondering whether there had been another meeting that night, and more



than ever confused as to what connection there could be between the miller and the man he had passed.

The village inn was soon reached; but, like every abode in the place, the Lion was shut up, and not a light to be seen; so he turned back and hurried along, for the rain came down in torrents. Altering his intentions, however, before he reached the mill, Frank ran towards the cottage where Jem Wood lodged, thinking that he might perhaps gain some tidings of the truant; and after a great deal of hammering Solid Mahogany's head at last appeared at the open window.

"Saw him drive in the Lion yard at ten o'clock," said Jem, in answer to Frank's queries. "Sure it was him, because he drove Hopcraft's horse. Saw him go into the kitchen, too; and then, seeing as he meant to stop, I wouldn't go in, but came away directly."

This was all that Jem knew, so Frank left him to his slumbers, and made up his mind that Sampson had stopped all night at the Lion. So

going up to the mill he took a glance round and secured the principal gate, which was swinging about; and then hurried into the cottage to tell Mrs. Elton his thoughts upon the subject, dismissing the matter by saying—

“Ah, he'll be in before we are up in the morning.”

It was rather late before mother and son met at breakfast, when the first inquiries were respecting Sampson; but Mary had not seen her master, and reference to the mill proved that he had not yet been seen there. Breakfast was therefore partaken of in silence, and then Frank walked over to the Red Lion, where he saw Host Hopcraft trying to pat the bar fire into a roaring blaze, for the morning was damp, drizzly, and cheerless, and more than one of the village gossips kept dropping in to talk of the last night's storm.

“Mornin' sir, mornin',” said Hopcraft, polishing a chair with a glass-cloth, and drawing it forward for his visitor.

"Good morning, Hopcraft," said Frank, looking round for what he could not see.

"Strange rough night, sir; two or three elms blown down in the Hall avenue. Took down two of my chimney pots clean smash; and, he-he-he-he-he, sir, such a joke, it's blown over the sign at Jones's—the King's Head, you know—the beershop."

"Ah! it was a rough night," said Frank; "but you slept well; for I was up here at one o'clock, and there was no one stirring."

"You by here then, sir?" said Hopcraft. "Didn't know of a party anywheres."

"We were uneasy about Mr. Elton not returning," said Frank, "and I came to see if he were here. Isn't he up yet? Had a little more than——eh?"

"Never got a drop here, sir," said Hopcraft, indignantly. "He'd had enough, cert'nly; but not here;" and the innkeeper seemed to consider himself much aggrieved that it had been so.

"He *was* a bit upset then?" said Frank.

"Well, yes—yes," said the man; "but not to say bad, you know. Just enough to make him pleasant and civil."

"Well, it's time he was up, then," said Frank.
"Has he been called?"

"Sure I don't know, sir," said the man. "He didn't sleep here."

"Not sleep here!" echoed Frank.

"No, sir," said Hopcraft, shaking his head.
"I'll just tell you how it was, sir. He hires my horse to drive over to market, and didn't get back here till after—— What time did Mr. Elton come back again, missus?" he cried to some one in the back region.

"Quarter after ten," replied a very shrill voice.

"Ah! quarter after ten," said Hopcraft; "and then he goes and stands before the kitchen fire, and then comes before this fire for a good hour, when he gives Ostler Tom his shilling, and then, wet inside and out as he was, he starts off home."

"And then came back?" said Frank.

"Came back! No; he never come back here," said the man. "I haven't seen him since."

Frank stood pondering and thinking where he should inquire next.

"Didn't he come home at all, then?" said Hopcraft.

"No," said Frank, "He must have called somewhere on the road." But he could not see where Sampson could have called; and he walked slowly home, half expecting to see the worthy at the mill. But no; he had not been to either house or mill; neither had he been seen at either of the cottages. The matter was then talked over, and the Rector and Squire Vaughan taken into the consultation; but not a foothold could be found for surmise. There was no deep ravine or ditch where the miller could have fallen; the only thing possible was, that he might have gone into the yard, and then have slipped into the rushing river, when he must have been swept off miles away by that time, perhaps right into the Ripple itself. But then he had no business

down by the mill; and it was hardly likely that he would have gone there on such a rough night, though certainly the open gate did look suspicious. Frank thought that Bill Graves might know something; but he too had disappeared, and his wife declared she did not know where he had gone. So Frank concluded to let the matter rest, for Sampson might perhaps have gone away on business, and would of course be much annoyed if any stir was made about his absence; whilst the disappearance of Bill Graves at the same time made this appear more probable.

Two, three days, a week slipped by, but no tidings of any kind. The water had gone down a great deal, and now it seemed absolutely necessary that a search should be made; so the dam and pool were thoroughly dragged, but without making the discovery that all dreaded. Bill Graves was still missing; but it was evident that Mrs. Graves knew why he was absent, from the easy state of mind in which she seemed to be; though nothing could be got out of her beyond

that she was "certain sure he hadn't seen Master Elton."


Then odd whispers began to run through the village. Jukes, the barber, said the old un had got his own at last; the cronies at the Lion had it over every night, and decided that it was very strange. Remnant, the draper, who came round from Edgeton and took orders, said with a sneer that money was at the bottom of it. But the draper's insinuation was directly cried down; money there certainly seemed at the bottom of it, but the money gave a far more serious turn to the matter; for it turned out that Sampson had received over five hundred pounds for corn that evening at Edgeton, and that he had stayed drinking at the Chequers with his customer until too late for banking. Bloveel, the butcher, had the largest number of supporters, for he gave it out as his conviction that the miller had been knocked on the head.

"But," said he, "mark my words—murder will out!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SUBSTANCE OF THE SHADOW.

THE uncertainty in connection with the fate of Sampson Elton had not been without its effects at the cottage; but it were hard to say that there was any real sorrow felt. The business went on as usual, while the main difference was, that there was peace. Frank felt more than ever puzzled respecting the disappearance, for he could not bring himself to think that there was anything serious at the bottom of it all; but now more than ever he felt how ignorant they were of his step-father's antecedents, for a strict examination of his mother only proved that her knowledge of her husband's former life and his connections amounted to *nil*. That there was some hidden connection between him and Graves, Frank felt



sure; and then he began to calculate where it was possible for the miller to have gone.

He might have gone on to Ramsford, and taken the night train, which passed through about two o'clock, though it must have been some very strong reason which took him nine miles along dark country lanes during such a storm. But inquiry produced nothing definite from the clerk on duty that night.

Let him see: "Mail train on Edgeton market night; 2.20 A.M. Yes, two or three people went by it," he thought. "No, he did not know Mr. Elton." "Was one a short dark man?" "Yes," he thought one was a short dark man. "Had he a peculiar look about the eyes?" "Well, he couldn't say for certain; but, now he came to think of it, the dark gentleman was very tall, and had a young lady with him."

The woods were searched, and Job Gauntlet spoken to; but his policeship did not seem to make much of the affair; and at last, after taking counsel with the Squire, Frank went off to

Edgerton, had a conversation with the superintendent there, and had bills printed, offering one hundred pounds reward for the discovery of Sampson Elton. While at Waveley, Stephen Vaughan exhibited great activity in aiding the searchers, and had even superintended the dragging of every likely hole in the river, but all without success: then, after Frank's visit to Edgerton, Mr. Gamble became excessively busy, searching and making inquiries, a great number of which seemed to be made in the Red Lion and King's Head; but the only result of his investigations was the consumption of much much liquor at other people's expense.

Not long after this character appeared upon the scene of action in the person of Mr. Superintendent. He arrived with Elton over in his light cart from Edgerton one morning, got up at the Lion, and then, so to speak, spread himself through the village. Then he knocked up Job Gamble, that worthy was sleeping off the fatigue consequent upon much

inquiry; much beer; and what he called a night of duty.

Soon after, the superintendent left his subordinate at the gate, and announced himself to the inmates of the cottage. He made a few inquiries, and then stated that he was about to search the mill, so as to set the matter thoroughly at rest in that direction; for, said Mr. Raynard, "The poor gentleman may have fallen in somewhere."

"I had the place thoroughly searched and dragged," said Frank, as they walked across; "but if you think it would be better done again, by all means let it be so."

"Well," said Mr. Raynard, quietly, "perhaps it would be better."

On entering the mill, the men were summoned, and the wheel stopped. The sluice by the waste water was opened to its widest extent, as well as the small sluice by the pool, and then away went the water thundering through the gratings in a torrent of white foam, and then off down the river, eddying, and sweeping the reeds

and rushes out of their hole upon the bank, and washing away the clay until the stream turned yellow.

In half an hour the water was at its lowest, when the deep holes in the pool were sounded with the drag-poles, though without success. But at one time a snail ran through the crowd, for Jem Wari, who was up to his knees in black mud searching about with the great weed-sake, suddenly called out, "I have him!"

And then he was seen to have hooked hold of something heavy, which he slowly drew towards the surface; lost; hooked again; and then drew ashore; but it only proved to be a bag containing bricks and the remains of some animal.

"Bless it in amn this dog Sharper, as the governor made such a fuss about," said Jem, kicking the bag away again. "What do ye think of that, Master Frank?"

Frank smiled, for he recalled the day when he and Stephen had drowned the vicious dog, years before, for biting Mrs. Elton; but he was now

too anxious to take much notice of the incident, and followed Mr. Raynard to the mill-head, which was, however, soon searched, for here the water was completely drained off, the little stream running away in a small channel by the waste water.

Nothing was to be seen here but decayed branches of trees; masses of half rotten weed, with here and there the traces of fish, wriggling and splashing in the little pools of mud and water. A few drags in places satisfied Mr. Raynard, when the party adjourned to the mill, where sacks were moved, and the place searched from top to bottom, but without effect.

"You see he could not have got into the mill," said Frank, "for it is always locked of a night, and the key brought in and hung in the passage; and I am quite certain it was locked that night."

"Ah! just so," said the superintendent; "then now we will have a look where the great wheel is."

"Why, he can't be in there," said Frank;

"because the gratings would have stopped him from passing down."

"But there's a way in from outside here, I see," said the superintendent.

"Oh, yes," said Frank; "but it's kept locked up, and seldom opened, on account of the danger. The key hangs by it there in amongst the ivy. I don't believe it has been open for a month, at least it has not to my knowledge. Do you know, Jem?"

"Open last week, sir, when I went down to file the wheel." Saying which, Jem led the way to a low door in the side of the mill, where, upon a nail hidden by the ivy which covered the lower part of the building, hung the key.

The door was quickly opened, and Mr. Raynard peered down into the dark cavernous place, where the water dripped with a loud, hollow, and strange sound, that made more than one bystander shudder. The place resembled a great brick-work cellar, or a huge tank, wherein, like some mighty instrument of torture, the great overshot

water-wheel revolved. It was lighted only by the open doorway and the small outlet from which the water escaped into the mill-race. The place might well be termed dangerous, a feeling of insecurity being produced merely by gazing down upon the black water dimly seen through the obscurity, or upon the green, slimy, and dripping wheel, now motionless, but over which, when at work, the water came plunging and splashing in a torrent. Even now the hollow reverberations made by the dropping water sent a cold chill through the bystanders, for the news of the search had soon brought quite a crowd down to the mill.

"Here, let me go first," said Jem Wood, "and mind how you come, for the steps is slippery."

"Here ; you go next, Job," said Mr. Raynard. "How deep is the water ?"

"Not more than three foot," said Jem, descending the rough stone steps, and then jumping into the water, which rose to his middle, as with a hollow echoing splash he sent it flying

in all directions. "Now, then," he cried, "one on yer go up and see as no one starts the wheel, or we shall some on us be in for it."

A man was sent into the mill, and then the rakes were handed down and the search began.

"Plenty o' mud," said Job Gauntlet, reaching as far as he could, but without getting off the bottom step.

"Reach out well," said Mr. Raynard, leaning in, and peering down into the black water. "Stand back there: the place is nearly as dark as can be, without the light being stopped out."

"Splash-splash-splash," "drip-drip-drip," hollowly sounded the water, and then there was a tremendous dash and scuffle heard; for Job Gauntlet, in his extra care to keep himself dry and clean, had slipped upon the slimy stone step and gone head-foremost into the water, from which he rose dripping and hatless, so as to provoke a smile even from his superior.

"There; don't get out, man," said Mr. Ray-

nard, "as you are soaked, you may as well thoroughly search the place before you leave."

Job Gauntlet very surlily let himself back again into the water, and began feeling about with his drag, and this time he got hold of something.

"Pull steady," said the superintendent, "there's something there."

Jem Wood hooked his rake on as well, and then they drew the obstacle slowly up to the brickwork and held it there.

"Why, it's only an old post," said Jem, getting one end above water. "Don't let go agen, for it'll be best out. Get a bit o' rope somebody."

The rope was fetched, secured to the black and decayed wood, and then there were plenty of willing hands ready to draw the muddy log into the mill yard, where those who had been shuddering and watching the proceedings with bated breath, now burst out into a hearty laugh at the police, which ended in two or three being

ordered out of the place by the stern superintendent. Then the raking was tried again and again without success, for the place seemed to have a strange attraction for the superintendent ; but at last Mr. Raynard was about to summon his follower and leave the place, when, taking a last look round, something caught his eye and he exclaimed—

“What’s that up at the top there?”

Every eye within range was immediately directed at the pointed-out spot, and then by means of a rake a piece of soaked and torn cloth was hooked down from the top of the great wheel, where it stuck in a piece of jagged wood. It was muddy and sodden, but looked like the remains of a piece of grey tweed.

Mr. Raynard gazed upon the scrap for a few moments with eager eyes, and then, forgetful of his tight trim blue suit, he descended the steps, let himself down into the water, and seizing a rake began to feel about with it close under the teeth of the wheel, and then wading round to

the other side where it was darkest, he began to feel again.

All at once a thrill ran through the crowd, for in an excited tone Mr. Raynard shouted—

“He’s here!—and the wheel has jammed him close against the bottom!” he muttered. “Confound you!” he shouted again. “Stand back from the door; it’s as black as Egypt here. Tell the miller to back the wheel a little.”

The superintendent might well exclaim; for the door was completely blocked with anxious faces, and already in imagination the lookers-on saw the swollen and distorted body of Sampson Elton brought out into the daylight.

And now the wheel began to “plash-plash-plash” as it slowly revolved in a reverse direction, till the superintendent, who had been standing on one side, suddenly shouted—

“Stop, now; and give us more light.”

The wheel became once more stationary, when the superintendent began to search about eagerly with his rake, aided by his man, and directly

after appeared to get hold of something heavy, which was dragged forward for a short distance, and then seemed to evade the rakes.

"Hook on, Gauntlet," cried the superintendent, in a state of the most intense excitement. "Now you have him again. Here, you sir," he shouted to Jem Wood, "don't go away; come and hold on here."

"No, thanky, master," said Jem, "I can't stand any more;" and then with a face of ashy pallor, and shivering like a leaf, the man climbed out into the air, drenched with water, but all the time wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"Now then!" cried Raynard, "let's have that rope again."

The rope was quickly disengaged from the log of wood, and passed down into the hole, where the superintendent made a large noose and passed his hands with it under water. He then drew it tight, gave his hands a wash, and climbed out quickly into the yard.

"Now then," he cried, "quick there; bring a

gate and some sacks. No; here, this will do. Hook this door off its hinges."

The door of the mill hole was lifted off, and laid down in front of the opening; sacks were fetched; and then, and then only, did the officer prepare to bring his discovery to light.

"Stop a moment!" exclaimed Frank, who was terribly agitated; "stop a moment, while I see that no one comes out of the house." And then he ran off, while Mr. Raynard smiled somewhat grimly as he followed him with his eye until he disappeared within the cottage,

"Now, slowly and steadily," said Raynard. "That's right; one of you hold up the end of the door. Now then, pull away!—easy there!—that's it!—Gently! Well done."

As the officer gave his directions the rope was tightened, and he guided it himself with the water running from his hands, till a bloated, swollen, and fearfully disfigured corpse was brought out into the light of day—being drawn on to the door laid ready for the purpose. The face had almost

lost all trace of humanity ; while the wheel, from grinding and beating upon the body, had not merely torn off a great portion of the clothing, but mutilated the form in a frightful manner—so horribly that people turned away sickened and shuddering.

“That’s the master, sure enough,” said Jem, with a shiver ; and speaking quite in a whisper, for like the rest he seemed awe-stricken at standing in the presence of death—death in so fearful a form.

“Yes, that’s his hair,” whispered a man through his teeth, as he shrank back from the hideously loathsome object.

“Good God ! look at the eels !” exclaimed another, as a couple of slimy monsters twined themselves away from the body—one to escape back into the hole, where it fell with a hollow sounding splash, the other to twist about upon the wet ground, where it was beaten and stamped to death with every token of hatred and disgust.

“Sacks !” cried the superintendent abruptly ;

and setting the example himself, the body was quickly covered, and then borne off to the stabling of the Red Lion, followed by a procession which increased at every step, till the doors were closed upon the ghastly corpse, when the village people divided themselves into two parties ; one of which spent the day in watching the mill-hole, and the other in standing about the Red Lion stables, staring at the closed doors, and telling the horrors of the scene to those who had not been witnesses of the discovery. For from far and wide the people came flocking in on hearing that the miller had been found murdered in the hole of his own mill. And far and wide, too, spread the news ; while ghastly and silent, but in that very silence sending up an appeal for retribution, lay all that was mortal of Sampson Elton.

CHAPTER XV.

A BOLT FROM THE CLOUD.

EARLY on the evening of the day which brought such a stirring incident to the quiet village, Frank sat with Mrs. Elton at the tea-table, but with the meal untouched—for since Mrs. Elton had heard of the discovery, thoroughly horror-stricken and unnerved, and almost without cessation, she had sat and wept; but, at the same time, shown how thoroughly she was bewildered by the stroke which had fallen upon her home. While, as for Frank, he was endeavouring to find some clue by which he could trace the mystery to its source. One thing was plain: Sampson had had some mysterious connection with a visitor who met him only by night; and, undoubtedly, Frank felt that that visitor must have been the missing man, Bill Graves. But

then what could have induced him to take the miller's life? Money? Perhaps so; and yet, but for his absence, Frank would have been ready to vouch for Bill Graves's honesty in all cases where game was not in question. Was it revenge for Sampson's harsh treatment of him and his wife concerning matters of rental? He always came back to the same way of thinking; and that was that the miller had been murdered and thrown into the wheel-hole by some one well acquainted with the place—some one who knew where the key was kept, and who had afterwards locked the place and hid the key upon its nail. He thought over the matter until weary with conjecturing, and at last gave up in despair, with the determination of seeking Mr. Raynard in the morning, and hearing his opinion upon the matter.

Frank had just come to the above conclusion, when the creaking gate and the following knock announced a visitor; and directly after Mary informed him that there was "that gentleman."

But that gentleman was so anxious to see master that he followed the girl into the room, and proved to be Mr. Raynard himself.

He was asked to be seated, for Frank and his mother looked upon the shrewd, keen-eyed superintendent with no little interest at this time; but very few words passed, for Mr. Raynard announced his desire to have a few minutes' conversation with Frank alone.

"Come in here," said Frank. "I was coming to you in the morning to talk the matter over;" and he led the way into the opposite room, at the same time looking very hard at the man, for there was a peculiarity and constraint in his manner that was rather startling.

"You'll tell me what it is," said Mrs. Elton, with her hands quivering.

"Oh yes, ma'am; afterwards—afterwards, you know," said the superintendent.

Mrs. Elton sank back in her chair, more pale-faced than ever, as the others passed out of sight, and the door was carefully closed; when Mr.

Raynard took a paper from his pocket, laid his hand on Frank's shoulder, and said, in measured formal tones—

“Mr. Frank Henderson—I take you on the charge of murder: you are my prisoner.”

“What!” exclaimed Frank; but then lowering his tone—“Prisoner! Nonsense, Mr. Raynard. What does all this mean? You don't suppose I had anything to do with the matter, do you?”

“You'd better not say anything one way or the other, sir, if you'll take my advice. I've got my duty to do; and that is—to take you; and I'm going to do it.”

“But it's nonsense—it's preposterous! And whoever charges me must be mad,” cried Frank, with flushing face and knitted brow.

Mr. Raynard had a staff in his hand in a moment.

“Am I to call in assistance, Mr. Henderson?” said he.

“Charge—murder —me?” gasped Frank,

half stupefied, and gazing confusedly at the officer.

"It's my duty to caution you again, that anything you now say will be brought against you in evidence," said Raynard.

"But the—my friends—the——But there," exclaimed Frank, recovering himself; "it's a mistake, Mr. Raynard. What is necessary to be done?"

"Why, now you talk sensibly," said the superintendent; "and let's hope you're right. Now, you have to come over to Edgeton with me to-night. Don't now—don't kick against it," he exclaimed, as Frank started angrily; "duty's duty, you know; and you can read this warrant if you like."

"But I was—that is, I intended to go to the Rectory to-night," said Frank.

"Very sorry, sir; but you must put it off, then."

The blood seemed to flush into Frank's forehead and then retreat to his heart, leaving him deadly pale; and he was about to answer

angrily, but he checked himself ; and laying his hand upon the officer's arm, said, in a low voice—

“ You have known me from a boy, Mr. Raynard. I am perfectly innocent of this charge. I'll accompany you to Edgeton ; but spare me all the degradation you can. Have you a man outside ? ”

Mr. Raynard nodded.

“ Then send him away, and try not to call attention to the purpose for which I am fetched.”

Mr. Raynard dabbed his bald head all over with his handkerchief as he looked Frank fully in the face, then, in a suspicious tone—

“ Honour bright, sir ? ”

“ Yes,” exclaimed Frank ; “ indeed you may trust me ; ” and then, coldly and proudly, “ I have nothing to evade, Mr. Raynard.”

The superintendent looked at his capture again for a few seconds, nodded his head once more, walked on tip-toe to the window, opened it, closed it again, and walked back to have

another good stare in Frank's face; but apparently satisfied, he walked back to the window, opened it once more, and gave a gentle cough, which brought some one to his side in a moment, when a whispered word sent the new-comer off just as quickly.

As soon as he had closed the window, Mr. Raynard turned round to Frank, saying—

“I've sent him for the trap.”

Superintendent Raynard was not an unfeeling man, though the energetic pursuit of his professional duties had tended to make him look upon all the emotional displays of his captures with a very business-like eye. He was, after many years' experience, disposed to enjoy a good burglary, and to rub his hands with the zest of a sportsman when hunting down felons. And then, who could be happier than he when he had forged the chain of evidence, link by link, and hung it round a culprit's neck, to send him off to penal servitude. He used, at such times, to return to his family smiling and at peace with

himself, as though he had done some very benevolent action. But he was not used to such prisoners as Frank Henderson; there seemed something fresh to him in the case; and after looking in the young man's pallid face for a minute, he said—

“Now, once more, honour bright that you won't play any tricks, and I'll get you over to my place so quietly that no one shall notice it. You promise?”

Frank nodded.

“That's right. Now then, cheer up, and try a pinch of snuff. What—you won't? Then I will.”

Having refreshed himself from his tartan box, Mr. Raynard led the way into the next room, where, addressing Mrs. Elton—

“I'm sorry to take your son away just now, ma'am, at a time when, as one might say, he'd be a comfort to you; but he's obliged to come on to the town with me for a day or two. We'll take care of him, though,” he said, smiling pleasantly;

and then, before Mrs. Elton had recovered from her surprise, Frank and the superintendent had left the house.

Mr. Raynard kept his word; for on going out into the lane, where the horse and cart were in waiting; or, as he called it, his "trap"—thief trap—with Job Gauntlet holding the horse's head, a word sent the deputy off. Then mounting into the vehicle with his prisoner, he drove gently up the village street, all the while chattering pleasantly; but Frank's nerves were called upon to bear one more shock before they cleared the place.

It was a bright moonlight evening; and before they had gone far they encountered Madeline and the Rector, evidently on their way to the cottage. Mr. Glebeley held up his stick, as if to arrest the horse, on seeing who was in the cart; but Raynard only touched his hat, shook the reins, and the horse stepped out so that they were some distance past in a very few moments. Directly after, they met Stephen Vaughan, who

stopped short ; but directly after passed on, after waving his hand, evidently bent upon dodging the footsteps of Madeline ; at least, that was the construction put upon his movements by Frank, whose wandering thoughts prevented him from paying much heed to the superintendent's remarks. But the distance was not great to the market town when behind a fast-trotting horse ; and soon the prisoner was sitting, half stupified, in the station cell at Edgeton.

“ Murder will out ; ” and before Superintendent Raynard and his charge were well clear of the village, Mr. Job Gauntlet, number 25 in the Ramsfordshire constabulary, feeling now that a good day's work had been done, and that, what with the discovery and the capture, he must be looked upon with something like favourable eyes, decided to devote an hour to rest and refreshment before attending to the duties of the night. So Job strolled into the Red Lion, and calling for his pint of Hopcraft's fourpenny, sat down to enjoy it. But he need not have called

for a pint of fourpenny, since there was a very strong party assembled at the Lion that night; and as soon as Job made his appearance he found that he was not wrong in his conjectures, for he was a man of considerable importance in the present crisis, as was proved by a place being directly made for him in a post of honour by the cosy fire.

For five minutes there was a smoky silence, when the butcher spoke, after elevating the foot of his heavy glass, with the stirrer sticking out between his fat fingers, until the vessel was upside down, when he slowly replaced it in its normal position upon the table.

"I can't bottom it, nohow; but you see I was right; he was knocked on the head. What do you say, policeman?"

Job Gauntlet did not say anything just then; but he looked hard at the querist for a few moments, and then apparently luxuriating and swelling out with his new-born importance, he took a good stare all round at the company present,

until he had reached the point from whence he started, when he gave two or three very significant nods, and said—

“Right you are, sir!”

There was a moment's pause, and then it was that Job found that if he had had patience he might have kept his twopence in his pocket, for a general desire seemed to come upon the company to offer him drinks out of the various tumblers upon the table. Those four words had done wonders, expressing such a depth of knowledge, and so much authority, that people winked significantly to one another, and no attendant upon the Delphic oracle ever waited with more anxiety than did the Waveley gossips hang upon the re-opening of the policeman's lips.

“Right you are, sir,” said P. C. Job Gauntlet again; “and what's more we've took him as did it.”

“Why, *I* saw Raynard go by in his car,” chorused three or four at once.

“Oh, yes,” said Hopcraft, who stood leaning

against the door-post, ready to take orders ; “ he called here this evening, and had a glass of ale.”

“ Why he went back again with young Henderson in his cart,” said Mr. Teedate, from the shop.

“ But,” said Mr. Bloveel, the butcher, banging his fist down upon the table, and making the glasses chatter,—“ but you don’t mean to say as it was——” the speaker did not finish his sentence, but remained, open-mouthed, staring at the policeman.

Job Gauntlet did not answer for a few moments, because he was busy tasting the grocer’s freshly-filled tumbler of brandy-and-water ; but when he had replaced it upon the table, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and again wiped the back of his hand upon the red cotton handkerchief in his heavy hat, he slowly said—

“ When you see us give a gent a ride in our fisshal cart, then something’s up, says you, and right you are, sir.”

There was a dead silence for a few moments,

as the frequenters of the Red Lion bar gazed at one another; and then, as in the days of Jehu, so now, every man gathered his garment about him and fled, till the bar of that snug hostelry, the Red Lion, was emptied of its guests, who stole one by one away, till the constable sat there alone, with the choice of some eight or nine unfinished glasses of spirits-and-water before him; and then in the space of one short half hour, as though the breeze had taken up the words and wafted them through the village, the news spread that Frank Henderson had been arrested for the wilful murder of Sampson Elton.

Every ear had been already so stretched with the previous news of the day, that there was plenty of entrance for that of the present; and before long it was known at the Hall, for the cook learnt it down at the shop, and rushed home with the report, when the choleric old farmer swore at her roundly for an "open-mouthed, red-faced, lying jade;" but he buttoned up, took his stick, and started off instanter to learn the truth. Mrs.

Elton was nearly driven mad by hearing it from Mary, who could hardly tell it for crying aloud, and she, too, had heard it in the village; Annie Newman heard it, trembling and horrified, from poor Miss Cinques, on whom it had had such effect that her ordinarily red nose looked pale, while the Reverend Augustus jumped up to go and offer some well-meant consolation to the widow. Then the Rector and his daughter, who had returned upon finding Frank was from home, were startled over their tea by their own servant rushing into the room and blurting out the report.

“Mr. Henderson taken up for murder!” cried the Rector, starting from his seat; but he was arrested by an exclamation from the girl, and he had barely time to start forward and catch Madeline, who was slipping from her chair to the floor.

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